TELOS

Number 20 **Summer 1974**

Table of Contents

Articles:

JOHN FEKETE: *The New Criticism*
THEODOR W. ADORNO: *Lyric Poetry and Society*
MARTIN JAY: *The Frankfurt Critique of Mannheim*
RONALD ARONSON: *The Ultimate Sartre?*

Notes and Commentary:

ANTONIO CARLO: *A Redefinition of Imperialism*
DICK HOWARD: *In Memory of Mallet*
JEAN-CLAUDE GIRADIN: *Reading Baudrillard*

Reviews:

GEORGE ROSS: Books on the Cultural Revolution by Daubier, Esmein, Hsia, Karol, and Schram
JOSHUA FOGEL: F. Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will*
TOM McCARTHY: T. Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination*
PAUL MATTICK, JR.: P. Sweezy and C. Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialism*
BART GRAHL: A. Sanchez-Vasquez, *Art and Society*
LIZ LONG: J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TELOS

Number 20 Summer 1974

Editor: *Paul Piccone*
Managing Editor: *Patricia Tummons*
Review Editor: *Paul Breines*
Production Staff: *John Ainlay, Melvin Oliver, David Pugh*
Editorial Associates: *Andrew Arato, Jean Cohen, Robert D'Amico, Andrew Feenberg, John Fekete, Bart Grahl, David Gross, Ruth Heydebrand Dick Howard, Russell Jacoby*

Subscription Rates

One year individual ..... $ 6.00
One year institutional ..... $ 8.00
Two year individual $12.00
Two year institutional $16.00
(*Foreign orders please add 10%.*)

Available back issues: Nos. 7-19, $2.00 each. Issues 1-6 may be obtained in microform through University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan. *Telos* is published quarterly in the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. *Telos* No. 20 corresponds to Vol. 7, No. 2. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Missouri. Address all correspondence and manuscripts to:

TELOS
c/o Department of Sociology
Washington University
St. Louis, MO 63130 USA

NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE
An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies.

New German Critique is an independent socialist journal of modern German society, culture, politics, and theory. The purpose of its interdisciplinary approach is to help develop a critical school in America and to eliminate the often artificial distinctions between disciplines.

Forthcoming: special issue on East Germany with articles on the convergence theory, mass-culture, historiography, political economy, Bertolt Brecht, Johannes R. Becher and Heiner Müller, plus – a classic by composer Hanns Eisler, plus – reports, reviews, and an extensive bibliography.

New German Critique
German Department
Box 413
The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

3 ISSUES PER YEAR

	Individual	Foreign	Institution
1 year	$ 6.00	$ 7.00	$ 8.00
2 years	$12.00	$14.00	$16.00
3 years	$18.00	$21.00	$24.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TELOS

a quarterly journal of radical social theory

Number 20 Summer 1974

Table of Contents

ARTICLES:

The New Criticism: Ideological Evolution of the Right Opposition 2
John Fekete

Introduction to Adorno's 'Lyric Poetry and Society' 52
Bruce Mayo

Lyric Poetry and Society 56
Theodor W. Adorno

The Frankfurt School's Critique of Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge 72
Martin Jay

L'Idiot de la famille: The Ultimate Sartre? 90
Ronald Aronson

NOTES AND COMMENTARY:

Towards a Redefinition of Imperialism 108
Antonio Carlo

In Memory of Serge Mallet 119
Dick Howard

Towards a Politics of Signs: Reading Baudrillard 127
Jean-Claude Giradin

REVIEWS:

Jean Daubier, *A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*
Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*
Adrian Hsia, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*
K.S. Karol, *La deuxième révolution chinoise*
Stuart Schram, ed., *Authority, Participation and Change in China* 138
George Ross

Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will* 153
Joshua Fogel

Trent Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination* 161
Thomas McCarthy

Paul Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialism* 167
Paul Mattick, Jr.

Robert M. Laxer, ed., *(Canada) Ltd.* 174
Steve Levine

Adolfo Sanchez-Vasquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* 178
Bart Grahl

Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* 183
Elizabeth Long

Index of Issues 16—20 190

Copyright © 1974 by Telos Press.
Permission to reprint may be readily obtained from the Editors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criticism: Ideological Evolution of the Right Opposition

by John Fekete

I. *Introduction*

The great manipulative social integration based on Keynesian transformations that was the specifically American type response of capital in the thirties and forties to its structural crisis was conditionally made possible, not only by economic factors such as a vast scale of production able to rely on a vast internal market, but also by cultural factors such as the lack of blockages by any major pre-capitalist cultural forms or structures. The neocapitalist rationalizations involved, not only the effective organization of working class energies as labor power, stabilized in the new labor groupings, but also the assimilation of such cultural/ideological opposition, coming from radicals of the right, as was cast in pre-capitalist forms. The study of the development and categorical structures of the New Criticism, a significant moment of the formation of North American ideology, is a case study within this perspective in the dynamics of such integrative relocation.

The New Criticism, so called after John Crowe Ransom's book in 1941 with that title, was not the first 'new criticism'[1] but by far the most significant one: it produced consciously a transformation of literary ideology which had the effect of inaugurating, on the level of the theory and practice of literary criticism, the process through which 'culture' was to occupy a new place within the realm of neocapitalist 'civilization.'[2] The movement was very successful and vastly influential; it dominated the field of theory for over a decade (roughly from the time of the Communist disintegration in the second half of the thirties, that is, the beginning of social integration under Roosevelt, to the anti-communist hysteria in the late forties, that is, the beginnings of deep consolidation under Truman), and the field of critical practice for several further years. It built an institutional basis so broad and firmly entrenched that to this day, although no longer the dominang form, New Criticism constitutes a substructure of modern literary criticism.

---

1. Murray Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry* (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 4n, records the earlier usages of F. Brunetière, 1906; J.E. Spingarn, 1910; Ludwig Lewisohn, 1919; and Edwin Berry Burgum, 1930.

2. 'Culture' and 'civilization' are two antagonistic terms of early nineteenth century diction which identify a cleavage in the historical practice of the age. This cleavage took shape in the form of a split between the spheres of the material production and reproduction of life, empirical 'civilization,' and the sphere of 'culture,' of the valuable objectifications and abilities that were dispensable in relation to the former. Romantic cultural theory opposes the two categories; modern theory reintegrates them under the extended categories of neocapitalist production relations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Its methodological principle of close attention to textual detail, adopted from T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards and intensified as a fetish, hailed as early as 1941 even by a severe critic as an impressive and unprecedented achievement,[3] has remained a permanent contribution to the tradition. But to view the New Critical success as primarily the success of an attempt, "for the sake of our complete humanity," to formulate "a new 'apology for poetry' " in opposition to both scientism and aestheticism [4] is to allow the self image of the New Critical project to take the place of an analysis that might penetrate below the surface of immediate description. I am going to try, in what follows, to offer considerations for establishing a commotive[5] location for the New Criticism.

The key figure to examine is Ransom, poet, teacher, critic, theorist, editor, and leading member of the Fugitive and the Agrarian and the New Critical phases of the development.[6] Foster is right to call him "philosopher general to the New Criticism";[7] and it is in that capacity that Ransom acted for over a quarter of a century as navigator of the transition, not only

3. H.J. Muller, "The New Criticism in Poetry," *The Southern Review*, VI, 4 (1941), p. 812.

4. Krieger, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.

5. In an earlier article (see "McLuhanacy: Counterrevolution in Cultural Theory," *Telos*, 15 [Spring 1973], p. 76), I offered the category 'commotion' in its various grammatical forms, as an alternative to 'conjuncture' whose use is fashionable in structuralist diction. The explanation below is reproduced (corrected) from that article: 'Conjuncture' is a synchronic denotation of a given balance of forces in a given moment of time and freezes history as a field within which forces can be stabilized for 'scientific' analysis, or as a diachronic quantity which can be grafted mechanically *post festum*. 'Commotion' denotes a moment of historical totalization defined by a specific relation of the transhistorical (objectified praxis) and the historical (objectifying praxis), a moment of the dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity. It carries notions of form, structure, function, and development within a view of history as a dimension of human activity. 'Commotion' replaces the abstract positivist juncture of forces and relations with the location of concrete potentialities in the motion of indeterminations of human activity and its products, and leaves room for the revolutionary praxis of a historical subject who is self-constituting through his objectifications. It is an ontological category that permits the abolition of alienation, not an epistemological category that reinforces it. If the term 'commotion' seems to carry some connotations of disorder that we find inappropriate, that is merely an indication of how much ideologies of rationalized order and stability have come to prevail.

6. Ransom is usually placed "at the head of the...movement" (C. Hugh Holman, "The Defense of Art: Criticism since 1930," in *The Development of American Literary Criticism*, ed. Floyd Stovall [Chapel Hill, 1955], p. 232). Elton calls him "Apostle" to Richards the "Father" (William Elton, "A Glossary of the New Criticism," *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, LXXIII [December 1948], p. 153). That specialist in the New Critics, John L. Stewart, compares him to "Moses leading us through the deserts to the promised land of poetry" (D. David Long and Michael R. Burr, eds., *John Crowe Ransom, Gentleman, Teacher, Poet, Editor, Founder of the Kenyon Review: A Tribute from the Community of Letters*, a supplement to Vol. LXXXX, no. 7, *The Kenyon Collegian* [Gambier, 1964], p. 9). Allen Tate writes that some of his own essays were "scholia" on Ransom's (*Essays of Four Decades* [London, 1970], p. xi), that "every page of his essays bears the trace of Ransom's work" (*A Tribute...*, *op.cit.*, p. 18); and Cleanth Brooks claims to have become "a hero-worshipper" at Vanderbilt college in Nashville, studying under Ransom (*ibid.*, p. 27). The tributes are perhaps exaggerated, but leave no room to dispute Ransom's powerful influence.

7. Richard Foster, *The New Romantics: A Reappraisal of the New Criticism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1962), p. 137.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a group of Southern intellectuals from Fugitive to Agrarian to New Critic, but, in the process, and more significantly, of the transition of literary ideology to a new social location.

To understand the New Criticism, we have to understand the contribution to it of the Fugitive and Agrarian phases. What we find if we examine the development phenomenologically is, first, an escapist Fugitive moment, comprising a self-image of outcast seeking refuge in an ideal realm, in the idealization of an interiority externalized and shared in the form of artistic objectifications. The position is defined by an absence of roots, hence the search for a cold technical objectivity. This moment modulates into a militant interiority externalized in the form of ideological struggle on the socio-economic level in the attempt to create the ideal life in place of the real one which is severely criticized and rejected. This Agrarian challenge to the overpowering reality is not only a complete failure; *it is anticipated to be a failure, and is fought as a lost cause.* In consequence, the failure is irrevocable and becomes the condition and motor for a new reconciliation.

Where Agrarianism had been socially and economically programmatic for the aesthetic life as a totality to which art was subordinated, in the New Critical perspective the power of Agrarian ideology is contained in literary criticism which operates (now without risk) from *within* monopolist non-aesthetic life in the cause of art. All possibilities of reshaping the exterior world are renounced to gain social sanction for the perfection of the interior world, the sensibility, through the strictly literary experience of life. We find, too, that the strong Agrarian critiques of industrialism are reduced to a critique of science, then to a critique of abused science, until finally peace is made altogether in the New Critical period and the primacy of science is acknowledged. The New Criticism becomes known as the defender of art through the view that art is necessary for truly human life and for knowing the world; but this is both knowing and living within the *established* reality through the contributions that the aesthetic sensibility can make. From the time of the Agrarian failure, the movement is inexorably one towards integration.

We can now penetrate to the deeper historical levels motivating these changes and specify the roots of the adequation of the theory to the dominant social *telos* in a way that will account for Ransom's positional reversals, for the integration, and for the thrust of his defense of art. On the Southern side, the period after the first world war saw a rapid industrialization of the South, an invasion by Northern monopolies. Both urban and rural traditional petty-bourgeoisie were being declassed. The South was changing its forms of existence, and Ransom and the others were a minority with no concrete links to the social life of the present. As Fugitives they sought refuge in poetry and metaphysics; as Agrarians they attempted one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last struggle for the survival of the traditional social class to which they belonged by background and social position.

When they failed, inevitably, Ransom was able to lead them to a new social location as part of the new professional petty-bourgeoisie, and the group could press their position from within the boundaries of their new social location as representatives of metaphysical and aesthetic value. As Fugitives, they had tried to resist their social dislocation on the grounds of culture, for which, as Agrarians, they attempted and failed to gain a socio-economic basis. Their defense of culture, in the absence of socio-economic content, was empty reaction referring back to an idealized past. In their integrated relocation, they could now press their cultural claims with new substance in historical content, although their methodological (and ultimately historical) range was now limited to the confines of their new home, the neocapitalist totality.

On the other side, of course, was proceeding the structural transformation of the social formation, including the capitalization of culture. It was precisely this integration that made it possible for the New Critics to emerge as a significant group. At the same time, art and values, threatened by the internal crises of aesthetic and ethical alienation, and by the external crisis of conflict with scientistic forms, were in need of a base for defense, but a defense which would facilitate the transition of these cultural objectifications to their new social location and relieve the pressure of the whole transformation.

The convergence of the two sides of this commotive problematic finds material realization in the academic humanities, itself made possible by the neocapitalist requirements for the expansion of education. The New Criticism, as an academic specialization, preserves the escapist Fugitive moment, no longer as an abstract negation but as integrated tension, and preserves as well, as constitutive moments, the Agrarian protest (now evolving into a harmless smug or helpless scorn for no longer challenged science), and, especially, the Agrarian failure (now transmuted into rejection of all socio-historical dimensions). In this form, the New Critical cultural apology can serve as the adequate ideology for the changing role ot culture in the commotion. Both sides of the convergence carry the contradiction of the inexorable integration and the cultural opposition to it[8] -an opposition that cannot succeed in the absence of social forces that can bring about the supersession of the whole historical problematic. The important point is that through his concerns with a traditional ontology slipping away from him in the social, the economic, the cultural, and the religious spheres, and through his search for a new ontology, Ransom is able to develop, through the internal dialectic of his own historical position,

8. The contradictory attitude to reality, the need for integration as well as the resistance to it, is, of course, expressed in the New Critical obsession with irony.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outside and somewhat distanced from the society as a whole, the adequate cultural ideology for a social formation itself in transition. And as Ransom's long Odyssey terminates in finding a new and integrated social location, so too the even longer Odyssey of culture back to the realm of civilization from which it had been separated in the nineteenth century begins to come to an end.

The structural crisis of liberal capitalism that produced the first world war also produced the following decade as a time of spiritual crisis, of disillusionment, disaffection, and dissent. The traditional reference systems of religion, morality, social mythology and ideals were disintegrating; personal escape combined with social protest; both cynicism and the search for an alternative, non-bourgeois future were important determinations on the cultural profile of the period, in literature, as in literary theory. The 1929 economic world crisis and the years following it shifted the panorama. Roosevelt at the head of the government, in the interest of the capitalist class as a whole, guided the first major phase of the transformation of the social formation through the intervention of the state to regulate and integrate the economic and social forces. In the field of aesthetics, by the thirties, liberalism had declined as a creative force and the reactionary Neo-Humanists were experiencing a second phase of influence, defending gentility through pre-capitalist standards developed earlier by Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt who condemned everything from humanitarianism and feminism to labor unions and popular education.[9] The main point is that their position was extra-literary, non-aestheticist. By the same token, as capitalism was seen to be unstable, the moment of radical possibility arrived, in literary criticism as in economics, and Neo-Humanism disintegrated. Marxist criticism,"a negligible force at the beginnings of the '30's,[10] became influential, and, although it was doctrinaire and failed to deal with the decisive formal aspects in the relations with content, it established important social dimensions for literary study.[11]

9. Bernard Smith, *Forces in American Criticism: A Study in the History of American Literary Thought* (New York, 1939), p. 347, observes justly: "It is one of the critical jokes of all time that these men should have bestowed upon themselves the title 'New Humanists'." In fact, the present study is in many respects a documentation of the total bankruptcy of modern bourgeois humanism. For useful descriptive material on the intellectual antecedents of and background to the New Criticism, in addition to Smith, see also: Stovall, ed., *Development of American Literary Criticism*; Walter Sutton, *Modern American Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, 1963); and Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade*, rev. ed. (New York, 1962).

10. Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 373.

11. Marxist criticism was fatally tied to the Communist Party, and fatally undercut by the latter's surrender to New Deal capitalism after 1935. The anti-fascist common front policy of the Party, and the new position that capitalism can realize the communist goals of peace and prosperity, imposed a general impotence on Marxist aesthetics. Philip Rahv noted at the time that Marxist criticism loses its function if it is abolished as critique by an enforced cooperation with the bourgeoisie: "The orientation towards capitalist democracy has deprived the proletarian writers of those political values which alone distinguished them from the non-prole-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It has been necessary to emphasize this development for two reasons. On one hand, we must bear in mind the moments and forms of ideological struggle and stasis which are an important part of modern U.S. history and locate the New Criticism as an ideological alternative to Marxist criticism. On the other, we must remember that the New Criticism which, in its Fugitive form, first developed in the twenties, gained its real influence only after the Marxist thirties with the collapse of the left movement in the United States and the collapse of Agrarian politics. In the twenties the form of Fugitive theory was aesthetic, disillusioned, traditional; in the thirties, in the economic transition, under the pressure of the struggle for the future of the society, the Agrarians, like Eliot, emphasized extraliterary consideration in opposition to those of Marxist sociologism. New Criticism is able to move in only later, not to combat a strong left wing position, but merely to occupy the vacuum left by the failure of socialist criticism to realize its opportunities.[12] At this point the New Criticism introduces a technicism and an accommodation with science to enhance the technological advance to positivity, and it mercilessly attacks and destroys left wing aesthetic forms, including the totally reformist forms of historical or sociological literary criticism. In other words, the cultural politics of the New Criticism are linked with the political culture of the period, and the cultural methodology reveals its politics directly.

Here we must relate the romantic-classical argument, that is, to relate the New Criticism along a certain salient axis to antecedent aesthetic polarities. In relation to the New Critics, the major bourgeois interpretations are divided: Krieger insists that these critics are significantly different from the romantics, that for them the unique poetic knowledge is controlled by the mode of discourse and not some transcendent psychology or intuition;[13] Foster insists that behind certain classicist principles lies a romantic sensibility "which most truly constitutes...the 'real' identity of the New

---

tarians.... As for Marxist criticism, it finds itself with less and less work on its hands. All that the Marxist critics can do is write conventional pieces with a slight social edge or else compose political polemics against the 'counter-revolutionary fascist-aiding Trotskyites'." (Cf. "Proletarian Literature: A Political Autopsy," *The Southern Review,* IV, 3 [1939], p. 627). In other words, on the level specific to the ideological field, the internal inadequacies of the Marxist criticism of the period, in combination with the external determinations of the surrender of the Party in the United States, and the politics of the Soviet Union in its domestic purge trials, its policy in Spain, and its pact with Hitler in 1939, produced the complete collapse of the Marxist movement and of Marxist criticism by the end of the decade.

12. I want to clarify this position: I am not trying to lay the entire blame for the rise of New Criticism on the Marxist movement. The establishment of New Critical ideology is primarily a function of adequation through ontological homologies. But what I *am* also arguing, is that the left must accept some responsibility for the fact that through the concrete struggles of the day, these homologies could be asserted and made to prevail. If the left does not accept some responsibility for major strategic defeats, it will never learn from the historical experience of its limitations and errors.

13. *New Apologists for Poetry, op.cit.,* p. 189.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Criticism as a literary movement."[14] Methodologically, here it is a question of both internal categorical transformation in comparison to the romantics, and of differential social location.

The issue can, in any case, not be reduced to either Krieger's categories of the type of knowledge involved or to Foster's categories of emotion, faith and metaphysics.[15] There are involved as well a whole set of categories structuring attitudes to nature and society which all testify to an attempt to 'classicize' and integrate the 'romantic' alienation. And what we must notice in Ransom is that, in addition to the 'classical' mimetic attitude to nature, the attempt to reconcile the state and the individual, and the formal restraint of his poetry, even on the level of rationality, there is a combination of anti-rationalism in metaphysics and rationalism in aesthetic criticism with—and this is important—the growing domination of a pan-methodological rationality that increases as the proffered social critique (defensive and reactionary though it is) declines.

The romantic critique of the alienation of reason, unable to link itself to historical forces, could not avoid the collapse into irrationality, a complementary bourgeois form. It is precisely the reverse situation which obtains with Ransom: the position is a right wing and irrational critique, abstract at the outset, *until it is relocated on the grounds of the dominant social rationality*. In the course of reintegration with the concrete historical realm, the position becomes increasingly rational, but the cost is the loss of its negative moments. To maintain the romanticist thesis, the evidence has to be seriously misinterpreted. Thus, Foster argues that Ransom's eventual stress on structure and logic is a move towards mystical religious Truth.[16] This is an absurd distortion; obviously, the move towards logic is the move towards rationality.[17]

---

14. *New Romantics, op.cit.*, p. 3.

15. Krieger, *op.cit.*, p. 189; Foster, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34. It is worth noting that far too much of the evidence Foster quotes to sustain his position is drawn from statements made by the critics in periods well past their peak influence.

16. Foster, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

17. Robert Penn Warren observes: "Both [Eliot and Ransom] have experienced a necessity for order, and, in consequence, have concerned themselves with disorder as the overt subject matter of their poetry. Both have diagnosed the disorder in terms of dissociation of sensibility, although Ransom, on this point, has been more general." Cf. his "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XI (Jan. 1935), p. 111. Cf. also Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill, 1965), p. 88: "To an astonishing degree, the problems which engage Ransom's attention turn out to be aspects of one situation: that of man's divided sensibility." And John L. Stewart notes that Ransom's prose is concerned with developing the appropriate epistemology and ontology for a pluralist cosmology where reason and sensibility would have their proper roles and satisfactions: cf. *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians—The Nashville Groups of the 1920's and 1930's, and the Writing of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren* (Princeton, 1965), p. 261. In other words, the Ransomian universe is structured by the same problematic of order that was central to Eliot and Richards. I must remark, however, that this problematic in Ransom is in motion. In the earlier self-definition *against* the society, the search is for an equilibrium defined in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II. *Fugitive and Post-Fugitive*

The Fugitives were based in Nashville which considered itself the Athens of the South,[18] and had discussed metaphysics for years before actually founding the magazine in 1922. This moment of metaphysics, and three other moments of poetic production, literary criticism, and space-time location in the South in a period whose driving impulse was 'progress,' together define the Fugitives. Their work, it seems agreed,[19] initiated the Southern Renaissance; but they wrote without social location in a South in transition, feeling no sympathy for the New South and rejecting the Old South. The name of the group focussed accurately the social position of its members as a triple alienation from, or negation of, the present, the past, and a type of art. Their self-image of the moment included the neo-romantic posture of the outcast with access to special knowledge; Ransom's unsigned editorial for the first issue of the magazine fixed their class posture with reference to the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South. Without raising the question of whether the blood in the veins of its editors runs red, they at any rate are not advertising it as blue."[20] And, in relation to formal aesthetics, Ransom, "the first modern" among the group, "castigated sentimentality whenever it showed its simple head and first set up the Baal of complexity for worship."[21]

Ransom's first important article on poetics, "Waste Lands" in 1923, raises significant issues, still with a neo-romantic coloration. Art is seen as "gently revolutionary" in contributing the "free and unpredictable associations discovered for the thing."[22] This becomes a permanent theme. But the artistic work is done by the imagination, inspiration, genius; the artist must be non-partisan and yield to "an agent more competent than reason."[23] This one-sided opposition poses an important feature of the bourgeois paradigm, its inability to unite partisanship with aesthetic autonomy, and its insistence on excluding partisanship from totality.[24] All

---

terms of the conflict of art against science. In the later self-definition from *within* the society, the equilibrium is proposed in terms of the biotic functional complementarity (involving a hierarchical primacy attributed to science) of art and science. This motion of the problematic of order comprehends the incorporation of a defensive reactionary critique in a corporate liberal integration according to the principles of corporatist functionality.

18. See Louise Cowan, *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History* (Baton Rouge, 1959), p. 5.

19. *Ibid.*, p. xv; John M. Bradbury; *The Fugitives: A Critical Account* (Chapel Hill, 1958), p. 3.

20. Cited in Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

21. W.Y. Elliott, in a letter from Oxford to the other Fugitives, Oct. 11, 1923. Cited in Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

22. Originally in *The Literary Review*, III (July 14, 1923); reprinted in *Modern Essays (Second Series)*, ed. Christopher Morley (New York, 1924), pp. 349-50.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

24. I am not using the category of 'partisanship' in the sense that has been imposed on it by Stalinist deformations of Marxist theory that attempted to enforce the assimilation of both artistic and theoretical production to the politics of state power. I merely wish to take note that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

genuine totality is totalization; it presuposes partisanship as its principle of totalization, its mode of giving meaning and structure in the construction of a world, whether in philosophy or in art. And this partisanship is not a barrier to objectivity; in fact, it is the condition of objectivity because it is the necessary link with the future. The position exposes the fullness Ransom seeks from the gift of art as no longer a criticism of life, but only a criticism of scientific partiality.

The next significant essay, a turning point in the development of Southern criticism, was "Thoughts on the Poetic Discontent" written for *The Fugitive* in June 1925. The article is a rejection of romanticism and a defense of a sophisticated dualism which Ransom calls 'irony.' He rejects first the romantic humanist rationalism, the 'naive dualism' of subject and object which expects nature to be plastic to the subjective will materialized in work. The world cannot be so controlled. Next he rejects the attempt to seek a mystical community with nature and adopts the Hulmean viewpoint that there is no such continuity between man and nature. What this sequence of punctured illusions produces is a new mature dualism involving "a mellow wisdom which we may call irony." And then come the famous and influential definitions of irony as "the ultimate mode of the great minds." "Irony is the rarest of the states of mind, because it is the most inclusive; the whole mind has been active in arriving at it, both creation and criticism, both poetry and science."[25]

We notice that the whole mind has been involved in a contradiction: the rejection of the work project of civilization on the grounds of a principled submission to limitation. The position is built on both criticism and passivity: the paradox of right wing alienation. It is like the writer's irony that Lukács calls "a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god":[26] the certainty that the ultimate has been encountered and grasped precisely in the scepticism of self-limitation.

In further work Ransom attempted to provide an epistemological-aesthetic foundation for this three stage sequence that climaxes in ironic dualism.[27] He argued that experience contains a sequence of three moments: a first moment of concrete precategorical experience; a second moment of categorization, of conceptualized knowledge aimed towards a pragmatic *telos*; and a third moment, a mixture, which recovers through images, coexisting with concepts, the qualities lost in the second moment.

---

all ideological production totalizes its object in terms of a determinate historical location, situated within a class structure and in relation with the determinate motions of class struggle.

25. See *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, I (August 1925), pp. 462-463.

26. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London, 1917), p. 90.

27. For two years, between 1926 and 1928, he worked on a book to be called *The Third Moment*, never published, partly incorporated in other writings at the end of the decade, and known only through his letters to Tate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The effect of this phenomenology is that in rejecting the specific contemporary history dominated by the scientistic moment, it rejects human history in general, just as, in the New Critical phase, the acceptance of historical development in general will lead to the acceptance of the specific form of modern capitalism.

We see the three moments, the methodological roots of a fundamental political instability which structures in the theory the internal conditions of possibility of a dialectic of accommodation. For the rigid separation and opposition of the sensuous and the categorical, the elimination of all conceptual elements from the world of actual experience means, too, the elimination of all linguistic elements, and, ultimately, the paradoxical reduction of that world to a state which is not human at all: the subject/object differentiation that is the condition for a human historical world is impossible in the absence of all abstraction. The attempt to duplicate experience in order to distinguish a level of experience free from or prior to the alienation of contemporary consciousness on the level of alienated existence means, effectively, the elimination of historical experience altogether, and the collapse of the human world into precisely that prehistorical realm of complete biological-instinctual domination that Ransom associates with reason and seeks to avoid. The other side of his paradoxical dissolution of historical ontology is that a solution appears available on the purely epistemological level. In this context, the articulation of the third moment in terms of axes of inclusion and fullness, that is, the mixture of the artificial duplication, confines the critique of science to the level of immediacy, blocks the questions regarding the historical alienation of both everyday perception and higher level categorization, and, contained on the epistemological level, abrogates the challenge to alienation on the ontological levels of experience.

If "what we require always is to return simply to the sense;" if "every Sensible is a source of inexhaustible sensation;" and if, therefore, "reality means simply inexhaustible quality,"[28] then two alternative modes exist for the realization of this project of a balanced third moment dualism. The expansion of needs and their satisfactions, the realm of the scientific-practical second moment, can be inhibited and a life constructed which will enhance contact with inexhaustible reality and recover the appropriate balance between the first two moments in objectifying the third moment as a way of life. Or, the continuing expansion of needs and satisfactions can be accepted, and third moment balance established through the parallel intensification of our symbolic contacts with inexhaustible reality. The first solution is that of Agrarianism, the second that of the New Criticism which here picks up the Richardsian threads leading to our salvation. It should be emphasized that both solutions naturalize capitalist

28. John Crowe Ransom, letter to Tate, Feb. 20, 1927. Cited in Cowan, *op.cit.*, p. 237.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alienation as the transhistorically unavoidable product of the materialist orientation; they differ only in considering materialism unnecessary or necessary, respectively.

Art is located in the process as an embodiment of the third moment. "Essentially, Poetry is always the exhibit of Opposition and at the same time Reconciliation between the Conceptual or Formal and the Individual or Concrete."[29] It combines the aspects of quantity and quality, while leaving the latter "free and contingent." Art includes a necessary moment of science; the romantic position of artistic superiority to reality is modified and the "wildly romantic" denial of science is considered "suicidal"; purity is exchanged for mixture: "An important detail is, to show why, with our formal cognitive habit or apparatus, we cannot have *fresh experience* of first moments; because they disintegrate as fast as they come. And this corollary: In Nature as compared with Art, our sense of Wholeness is extremely vague and unsatisfying; the artistic contemplation of Nature is better, a very advanced state, in which we are conscious of the scene as we might have conceptualized it, and at the same time of the scene as we actually do persist in intuiting it. But this is quite like Art; a Mixture."[30]

Moreover, Ransom insists, art has many relations with the world and it is "a species of idolatry"[31] to treat it as a formal absolute, as Tate following Eliot advocated. Already in September 1925 he had written for *The Fugitive* that "good poetry is that which fits our own passionate history, and expresses that which needs expression from our private deeps." To satisfy this vital need, he had sought to unite past and present and to establish, as Northrop Frye was to do later in a different historical context, more antiseptically and without the force of value concerns, the traditional conventions as the source of form. "Poetry is saved from being utterly licentious and chaotic by having a form and content based closely (as a general thing) upon Tradition... Its privacy consists perfectly with its conventionality, its formality."[32] With the discontinuation of *The Fugitive* in 1925, in the second half of the decade, Ransom's concerns are filtered through a developing sectional or regional consciousness and the search for social location.

1925 was the year notable for the Scopes Monkey Trial where John T. Scopes was convicted at Dayton, Tennessee for teaching Darwinian theory in the public schools contrary to state statute. Ransom was outraged at the ensuing ridicule of the South and felt caught up in the general polarization. The issues that were raised involved centrally the questions of nature and rationality and seemed to Ransom to focus the whole historical commotion.

---

29. John Crowe Ransom, letter to Tate, Sept. 5, 1926. Cited in Cowan, *op.cit.*, pp. 232-33.
30. Cited in Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 267.
31. John Crowe Ransom, letter to Tate, April 3 and 13, 1927. Cited in Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 342.
32. Cited in Cowan, *op.cit.*, pp. 211-212.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Fugitives had tried to avoid sentimentalizing the Old South; now it seemed that the real danger was the continuing economic conquest and spiritual humiliation of the South by the North. To defend the South, Ransom and the others had to oppose a whole conception of life to that of the North; to base that conception, they revived the culture of the past, its codes and ceremonies, and posited it as the embodiment of a mythopoeic, anti-rational, anti-progressive metaphysics. The position took years to evolve, but eventually it yielded the Agrarian defense.

What characterizes right wing ideologies, which have no real social basis for using the future as their point of reference and thus necessarily turn towards the past, is the idealization of the past, the abrogation of the effort to liberate tradition from conformism,[33] and the exaggeration of custom, which, as Franz Fanon says, "is always the deterioration of culture."[34] It is important to be aware that the Agrarian position is a deep mystification of the Southern past. It is, first of all, a racist history for which black people are either passive or invisible; secondly, it fails to record and interpret the fact that the South controlled national politics from the Revolution to the Civil War, and, especially in the last quarter century before the Civil War once the planters had won decisive supremacy in the South in order to protect the slave institution; thirdly, it ignores that behind the ideal of equalitarian-yeoman society up to the Civil War lay the politics of racism and power, that slavery was the power base for the plantocracy's subordination of white yeomanry; fourthly, it neglects the effects of slave resistance in corrupting the moral typology of the white culture; fifthly, it not only forgets the internal divisions among whites but also that racism was the operative principle of the unified culture in so far as it cemented white solidarity under planter hegemony; sixthly, it perpetuates the lie of the gracious South, a lie finally being torn to shreds as historians incorporate the reports of the oppressed, and it disguises the fundamental feature of Southern culture: that it was a *culture of control* involving social, political, and ideological moments necessary for dominating black slaves and keeping non-slave-owning whites in line.[35] Where any of these moments are acknowledged at all, they are acknowledged to be approved.[36]

---

33. Cf. J. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968), p. 257.
34. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 180.
35. See Harold M. Baron, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism," *Radical America*, V (March-April 1971), p. 3 and passim. Also, see Robert S. Starobin, "Racism and the American Experience," *Radical America*, V (March-April 1971), pp. 93-110; George Rawick, "The Historical Roots of Black Liberation," *Radical America*, II (July-August 1968), pp. 1-13; Robert S. Starobin and Dale Tomich, "Black Liberation Historiography," *Radical America*, II (Sept.-Oct. 1968), pp. 24-28; Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1971), passim.
36. Ransom wrote ("The Aesthetics of Regionalism," *The American Review*, II, Jan. 1934, p. 303): "The peculiar institution of slavery set this general area [the South] apart from the rest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All this notwithstanding, Ransom's philosophical dualism adopts the explicitly social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of an ostensibly irreconcilable North-South polarity. During this period, Ransom articulates his specifically truncated dialectic with reference to art: "Art is our refusal to yield to the blandishments of 'constructive' philosophy and permit the poignant and actual Dichotomy to be dissatisfied in a Trichotomy; our rejection of third Terms; our denial of Hegel's right to solve a pair of contradictions with a Triad. And here's a slogan: Give us Dualism, or we'll give you no Art."[37] The South clearly could not absorb the North; at least it must preserve its own autonomy; that is, the state of opposition is essential, dualist stasis a value, and Hegelian motion a danger. Conversely, once integration is accepted, much later, on the historical plane, dualism leaves the aesthetic realm as well in favor of a new monistic 'Concrete Universal'. It is the case, of course, that a truncated two term dialectic, whether Ransom's oppositions or democratic centralism, is an inherently unstable dialectic, and the weaker term invariably becomes subordinate to the stronger. The relative strengths are, here again, a function of historical determinations.

For the moment, however, what we must notice is how Ransom unites his aesthetic and historical concerns. In the same letter to Tate in which he had rejected a rigorous aesthetic formalism, he writes: "I subordinate always Art to the aesthetic life; its function is to initiate us into the aesthetic life, it

---

of the world, gave a spiritual continuity to its many regions, and strengthened them under the reinforcement of 'sectionalism'...." And further (p. 308): "The darkey is one of the bonds that make a South out of all the Southern regions. Another is the climate." Cf. Tate (*Stonewall Jackson, The Good Soldier* [New York, 1928], p. 39): "The institution of slavery was a positive good only in the sense that Calhoun had argued that it was: it had become a necessary element in a stable society. He had argued justly that only in a society of fixed classes can men be free." And, in his other biography of the President of the Confederacy (*Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall* [New York, 1929], p. 87), Tate specified his preference for "class rule and religion *versus* democracy and science." The contemporary political context should be noted as well. Since its revival in Atlanta, Georgia in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan was rapidly expanding. By 1924, that is, about the period when the Fugitives began to develop social consciousness, Klan membership was at four and a half million at a membership cost of ten dollars (*Labor's Untold Story*, p. 34; Stewart, p. 108, gives a figure of six million), and constituted a powerful formation against change, so that Ransom and others were not alone. The Klan elected politicians to all levels from mayor to governor to Congress and dominated the politics and governments of seven states. (By the thirties when the Agrarians launched full steam ahead into their program, the Klan had declined.) Andrew Lytle, one of the Agrarians, wrote yet another biography (*Bedford Forrest and his Critter Company* [New York, 1931]), about the Confederate cavalry commander who later became the Grand Commander of the Ku Klux Klan. The book is an unreserved endorsement of Klan activities. And the following is the perspective in 1930 of another Agrarian, Frank Lawrence Owsley ("The Irrepressible Conflict," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, by Twelve Southerners [New York, 1951], p. 62): "For ten years [after 1865] the South, already ruined by the loss of nearly $2,000,000,000 invested in slaves, with its lands worthless, its cattle and stock gone, its houses burned, was turned over to the three millions of former slaves, some of whom could still remember the taste of human flesh and the bulk of them hardly three generations removed from cannibalism. These half-savage blacks were armed."

37. Letter to Tate, March 1927. Cited in Cowan, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is not for us the final end. In the Old South the life aesthetic was actually realized, and there are the fewer object-lessons in its specific art."[38] This notion of 'the aesthetic life' provides for Ransom the key to the Agrarian defense of the South, and, as a relation to nature and to work, carries the full weight of his critique of modern capitalism. It is the failure of this critique that leads to its integration; the Agrarian project of the aesthetic life is later reduced to the New Critical project of aesthetic symbolization.

III. *Agrarianism*

God Without Thunder, Ransom's first book published in 1930, contains the assumptions of the preceding and subsequent periods: the aim, to explain "the function of the myths in human civilization,"[39] and the demand, to "restore to God the thunder,"[40] define the ideological program of Agrarian metaphysics. Essentially, the argument is structured in terms of three interlocking sets of dualities: the opposition of two teleological ontologies, two anthropologies, and two poltical economies. A review of the main contours of the position should illuminate its profile as expressing alienation, criticism, and futile reaction; it is locked into the peculiar posture of an anticapitalist critique filtered through petty-bourgeois interests into precapitalist forms: the critique is in permanent tension with its self-cancellation.

Ransom begins by positing religion in a causal relation to the whole of human life: "We mean by religion, usually, a body of doctrine concerning God and man. But the doctrine which defines God, and man's relation to God, is really a doctrine which tries to define the intention of the universe, and man's proper position within this universe. It is therefore his fundamental philosophy, it expresses the conviction he holds about his essential destiny, and it is bound to be of determining influence upon his conduct."[41] This theorization remains on the level of the search for meaning in everyday life, and projects a teleology beyond the goal-oriented labor process of human praxis, thus necessitating the transformation of reality into myth and the projection of limitation as the corollary of transcendence. Religion provides supernatural knowledge "not accessible to science;" it is "a system of myths, upon the scientific knowledge of nature as its base."

Roland Barthes observes that there is only one language which is not mythical, the language of man as producer or revolutionary, speaking "in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image."[42] We must note that Ransom's position, in reaction against the alienations of

38. April 3 and 13, 1927. Cited in Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 342.
39. *God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy* (London, 1931), p. xii.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
42. *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London, 1972), p. 146.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern capitalism, displaces the whole problematic of production and transformation. "The mind must accept the world order" which, moreover, is discontinuous with the "secular enterprise" based in the moral order.[43] As in the fascist theories that contended the spiritual determination of the economy,[44] for Ransom "the religion of a people is that background of metaphysical doctrine which dictates its political economy." A critique of contemporary forms of life on this basis must be contradictory and unstable.

Opposed to the religious perspective that reminds man "to remember his limits, and be content with his existing conditions,"[45] is "the new religion of science" which conceives man's relation to the universe as if God had invited man "to profiteer upon the universe."[46] This secular program "spins its projects for human improvement at the expense of nature, which it scorns, and of God, who is its spirit." Thus, scientific teleology in Ransom has an ontological character which we must remember in interpreting his arguments through their various analogical transformations. What founds this religion-science opposition is the view of reality that we have seen before: "Reality.. consists in a fulness of quality, not permanence of quality. A real thing is a bundle of complementary qualities and an inexhaustible particularity. Anything else is less than real, an abstraction from the real, though it may seem as precious and noble as a Platonic Idea, writ imperishable in the heavens."[47]

Science, in Ransom's view, mutilates nature for our practical objectives, brutally destructive in practice and in theory, and always involves "abstracting some arbitrary essence from the whole." "Science is quite willing to lose the whole for the sake of the part."[48] Meanwhile, the religious relation to reality involves the categories of fear, respect, enjoyment, and love; it conserves the object unselfishly. In its cognitive aspect, which shapes our beliefs and conduct, "the myth of an object is its proper name," and aims at the object's "fullness of being."[49] Art and religion, in this conception, share a basic metaphysical identity; where they differ is in the contrasting stability of the single religious myth and the mythic versatility of art.[50] It is to be noted that here, as throughout the

43. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 46.
44. See Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1968), pp. 21-22.
45. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 118. Cf. Tate in 1930 ("Religion and the Old South," *Essays of Four Decades, op.cit.*, p. 570): "For the social structure depends on the economic structure, and economic conviction is still, in spite of the beliefs of economists from Adam Smith to Marx, the secular image of religion."
46. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 16.
47. "Flux and Blur in Contemporary Art," *The Sewanee Review*, XXXVII (July 1929), p. 361.
48. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, pp. 139-40.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern tradition of literary theory, the ontological hostility between art and religion is systematically mystified. The elimination of the real problematic of alienation, in relation to which the primary opposition obtains, draws art onto the ground of religion and permits their anthropomorphic similarities to prevail in their characterization.

On this general basis, Ransom constructs two opposing philosophical anthropologies. In the scientific view, man is an animal with reason which serves his instincts and desires and "permits him to live a life more animal than that of animals." In the religious view, man is more than a reasoning animal, he also has sensibility: "In order to be human, we have to have something which will stop action, and this something cannot possibly be reason in is narrow sense. I would call it sensibility."[51] The utility fixation of alienated man, blocked in this society from appropriating the full human essence materialized in human objectifications, is opposed by a contemplative comportment which is itself, as Lukács showed, the alienated product of the progressive rationalization of labor.[52]

Ransom joins the Schopenhauer tradition of condemning the active life altogether and reducing man's world-creating subjectivity based in objective praxis to the interiority of a contemplative subject. In other words, in generalizing the rejection of specific forms of alienated activity, Ransom's anthropology eternalizes alienation as the inevitable and permanent product of praxis in the satisfaction of needs and the production of new needs. Thus, the same vantage point that allows Ransom at times a sensitive and incisive critique of aspects of capitalist alienation, also, by virtue of its backward orientation and affirmation of a key moment of reification, makes that critique necessarily ineffective and cut off from any alternative future.

The decisive error lies in Ransom's failure to understand that the universalization of the exchange relation, that is, the general principle of utility, is a necessary phase in the social evolution of human powers and activities.[53] He collapses objectifying praxis into reification, and in rejecting reification, also rejects the universal development of human productive forces which is its other side. This is a retraction of history, a regression to the idolatry of nature, and the glorification of passivity in the context of which Ransom's critique of capitalist alienation takes on the character of a strictly abstract negation, vitiated by its reactionary standpoint. The alienated theoretical attack on the alienated anthropology of capitalist society succeeds only in

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-197.

52. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1971), p. 88. See also Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Moscow, 1965), I, pp. 374-76; 423-24; 460.

53. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 163. All further references are to this edition.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occluding the ontological basis for liberation from the relations of capitalist alienation.

This difficulty is evident in the structure of Ransom's dualisms on the economic level of the way of life. His anthropological opposites clash materially on this plane. Ransom argues that in the scientific life, "man is reduced to being the tender of machines," that our existence is "mechanized, but not necessarily filled, not made more intelligent," but subordinated to the dictates of machines.[54] And he offers a sharp perception of the manipulation of desires and needs, in part through the seductive and unscrupulous sales effort,[55] and of the new responsibility imposed on man "as a regular consumer" to buy and use a "multitude of clean, shining, effective products" that he does not really need, while deep desires, e.g., for "ordering our geological and climatic environment on a large scale," go unrealized. "For what it fails to give us, mechanical science would like to make up by giving us plenty of things that we do not want."[56] He links the two sides of the process in the claim that "there is little to choose between the indiginities of modern man as a laborer and as a consumer." And he sees the process as inexorably dynamic: "This is not merely an age of machines but an age of progressive machinery... There is no economic stability. There is progress." And what Ransom opposes, in recalling again the classicizing problematic of order and balance, is the excess of science, the disbalance between appetite and appreciation, the tendency of science to usurpation and monopoly: "It is because industrialism gives an undue encouragement to science, and too much right of way to appetite, that we have to take the position that industrialism is far too dangerous a thing for us to indulge in. But for a similar reason we have to oppose the cult of science on its purely theoretical side, when it tries to monopolize our intellectual life."[57]

The alternative, again, is the religious view which, although not proposing a reversion to primitivism, does defend the status quo at each step of progress and challenges "any fresh and sweeping developments."[58] The religious theory of life, taken as identical with the aesthetic theory of life, is a critique of industrialism "and bids us halt the industrial progress."[59] The programmatic opposition for Ransom becomes the aesthetic life versus the anaesthetic life, developed theoretically through the decisive mediation of the relation with nature.

The products of science for a mechanized life, Ransom argues, reinforce dimensions of speed and power and their use is the practice of "a technique

54. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, pp. 172-173.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208 and pp. 216-217.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of anaesthesia" where we fail to observe "the sensible infinity which constitutes the landscape of our world." Scientific anodynes remove our attention from our inability to manage our material and social environments and direct it to fields where our "force is visible and certain." This is productive work, allegedly a universal panacea, but effectively an anaesthetic for people "afraid of the fullness of the inner life."[60] In general, science knows only the uses of nature, "does not credit nature with having any life of its own," and "is possible to us only on condition that we anesthetize ourselves and become comparatively insensible."[61]

This full interiority set up in opposition to external activity is based in a specific alternative relation to nature: this is "the purest esthetic experience," the contemplation of the infinite particularity of the objective world. "The aesthetic attitude is definable with fair accuracy in the simple and almost sentimental terms: the love of nature;"[62] "and that means the love of anything for itself,"[63] a relation of Kantian-Schopenhauerian 'desirelessness'. In the rejection of contemporary historical forms, Ransom turns sentimentally to nature; he posits a "*rapport* with environment"[64] as a fundamental need, and the arts as primary means of access to it. "The works of art are psychic exercises which are just so many rebellions against science;" and while one type of art criticizes science by its own standards, another "suspends the whole purpose-and-attainment process." Such art "exercises that impulse of natural piety which requires of us that our life should be in loving *rapport* with environment;" it permits us to "revel in the particularity of things, and feel the joy of restoration after an estrangement from nature."[65]

The aesthetic life is a crucial Ransonian category, both in its Agrarian affirmation, and its subsequent New Critical abrogation. Such a position involves a far-reaching value rejection of the life forms of Ransom's society; it is offered as critique. But the mediation of nature poses ambivalence. On one hand, nature becomes, as Lukács showed, "the repository of all these inner tendencies opposing the growth of mechanization, dehumanization and reification."[66] On the other, the nostalgia for nature mystifies the dehumanizing social institutions and blunts the critique by not directing the challenge at the social structures themselves. This links with the second aspect, the love of nature as the love of anything for itself. The alienation from a given form of social rationality translates an aesthetic disinterest into a general ethic without social *telos*; if science (whose positivist defi-

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-184.
61. John Crowe Ransom, "Classical and Romantic," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, VI (Sept. 14, 1929), p. 127.
62. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 180.
63. "Classical and Romantic," *op.cit.*, p. 127.
64. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 180.
65. "Classical and Romantic," *op.cit.*, p. 125 and p. 127.
66. *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 136.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nition Ransom adopts and opposes) ultimately leaves the established order (which it organizes as given) unchanged in the name of rationalism, Ransom's aesthetic life leaves the same order unchanged in the name of antirationalism. The farther the critique moves from the social forms that must be its target, the less concrete it becomes.

Yet, the anaesthesia, which is the object of the critique, must not be taken to flow, as Ransom suggests, inevitably from the machines, from a specific mode of objectification inserted as mediation in the man-nature metabolism. The *rapport* with nature that he formulates, representing the nostalgic desire to feel at home in the world, embodies a precapitalist relation; in this respect, precisely what distinguishes the capitalist mode of production from the feudal is a shift—of world historical significance—in the man-nature metabolism, that is, in the labor process: this process becomes, for the first time, purely social with the separation of the inorganic conditions of human existence from that active existence.[67] Man takes control of this essential metabolism: the man-nature relation becomes a strictly historical form of the social relations among human beings. That Ransom attempts to bypass this whole sphere of social determinations keeps his critique within the bounds of bourgeois ideology and prepares for its failure and integration.

Since Ransom cannot offer solutions on the level of social transformation, he seeks to incorporate social and economic dimensions directly within a metaphysical basis for the human metabolism with nature. On one hand, like the fascists of his time, he stresses "contact with the elemental soil;" on the other, specifies that "the best labor is the one which provides the best field for the exercise of sensibility—it is clearly some form of pastoral or agrarian labor."[68] In consequence, agriculture can serve Ransom and other Agrarians as the economic center of social-ideological agitation, intended to delineate a viable historical location for the protagonists through the specification of a suitable relation with nature. In other words, the solution is sought in a different level of technical relation to nature, and not in an alternative social articulation of the technical mastery of nature.

Most Agrarian articles appeared in Northern publications: *Hound & Horn, New Republic, The American Review.* This latter, especially, was founded to provide a base for the "traditionalist" critique of "Radicals of the Right" who sought to remedy the modern chaos through a return to discarded fundamentals; it promised sympathetic exposition to Fascist economics and politics, and planned to draw on four main groups: Neo-Humanists, neo-scholastics, English Distributists,[69] and Southern Agrar-

67. Cf. Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London, 1971), pp. 168, 169, 174; *Capital, op.cit.*, I, pp. 181, 506; *Grundrisse*, pp. 488-89.

68. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 127 and p. 201.

69. For a discussion of Distributists, see Seward Collins, "Editorial Notes: Belloc and the Distributists," *The American Review*, II (Nov. 1933), pp. 122-28.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ians.[70] Indeed, the Agrarians adopted a traditionalist standpoint, emphasized the moral cohesion of an inherited quality of life, and expressly held up as a value the Southern tradition of leisurely work and play reproducing the established European conservative forms of living "along the inherited lines of least resistance in order to put the surplus of energy into the free life of the mind."[71] Ransom recalled the eighteenth century South in terms of the "social arts of dress, conversation, manners, the table, the hunt, politics, oratory, the pulpit. These were arts of living and not arts of escape; they were also community arts, in which every class of society could participate *after its kind*. The South took life easy, which is itself a tolerably comprehensive art."[72] And this South, Ransom insisted, was to remain Southern "in the pure, traditional, even sectional sense."[73]

Critics such as V.F. Calverton[74] and Dudley Wynn[75] noted during the Agrarian period the contradictions of an appeal to tradition, in that the most fundamental tradition in the South was in fact the Anglo-Saxon Dissenter tradition, the Protestant progressivism of the yeoman class, the tradition of a petty bourgeoisie oriented to capitalist technological advance. Yet the Agrarians elaborated their idyllic versions with such confidence that it seems almost crude to raise the ugly blemish of the slave system, the profit fixation, or the ruthless exploitation of natural resources. In the event, the programmatic question could be phrased by Ransom in terms of his favored dualisms: "How can the Southern communities, the chief instance of the stationary European principle of culture in America, be reinforced in their ancient integrity as centers of resistance to an all-but-devouring industrialism?"[76]

Despite characteristic vacillations, the case of the Agrarians, by background, by occupation, by social position, by allegiance, and by point of view petty bourgeois, was directed ultimately against the monopolization of capitalist production and was not, in essence, an advocacy of feudal relations. The critique was a commotive critique in a period of growing agricultural and industrial concentration: it attacked a specific form of capitalist production while, at the same time, worshipping capitalist property ownership.[77] This is the decisive contradiction of Agrarian anti-

---

70. See Seward Collins, "Editorial Notes," *The American Review*, I, 1 (April 1933), pp. 122-17.

71. John Crowe Ransom, "The South—Old or New?" *The Sewanee Review*, XXXVI (April 1928), p. 140. Reproduced as "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," in *I'll Take My Stand*, *op.cit.*

72. "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," *I'll Take My Stand*, *op.cit.*, p. 12. My italics. Italicized words not in the 1928 version; added in 1930.

73. "The South—Old or New?" *op.cit.*, p. 139.

74. "The Bankruptcy of Southern Culture," *Scribner's Magazine*, XCIX (May 1937), p. 296.

75. "A Liberal Looks at Tradition," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XII (Jan. 1936), p. 70.

76. "The South—Old or New?" *op.cit.*, p. 147.

77. Cf. Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, trans. Brian Pearce (London, 1968), I,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capitalism which locates it as a struggle against change. Although they were writing at a time of profound economic crisis, Davidson stresses that they were disturbed by the boom period as much as by the spectacle of disorder; in general, they "were fighting against a development, not just trying to sentimentalize the past."[78]

In addition to criticizing the brutalization of labor and of consumption, and the "general decay of sensibility" through the wrong attitude to nature in the "evil dispensation" of industrial civilization,[79] Ransom attempts to argue his critique on the structural level of the internal contradictions, thereby differentiating his position from the apologist stance of the subsequent tradition. He criticizes Sidney Lanier for making superficial, if accurate, objections to capitalism, of the kind that can only lead to ineffectual liberal "reforms of the heart" such as 'fair play' or 'social justice.'[80] His own critique points to inevitable overproduction[81] and "that dangerous, or possibly that fatal, flaw in the capitalistic system...: its expansive principle, which does not permit of stability" and produces inevitable periodic breakdowns.[82]

But Ransom's metaphysical determinism betrays the economic critique in both instances. In the first, it leads him to see overproduction in relation to "the rate of natural consumption,"[83] rather than as the over production of exchange values, that is, the inadequacy of monetarily effective demand. What could have been a genuine critique of capitalism, indicating a rational redistribution and liberating redevelopment of priorities, thus becomes again an obfuscating critique of 'industrialism' from a basis in natural anthropology; the mystification of the historical development of the level and nature of basic human needs leads from there to a contradiction in terms of subsistence farming. In the second instance, Ransom is led, like many critics working from a left wing metaphysics, to underestimate the abilities of capitalism to modify itself with relative success in pursuit of

---

pp. 288-92: Mandel shows that capitalist property relations do not necessarily coincide in agriculture with capitalist production relations, that the former come first and may oppose the latter for a long time.

78. Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-307 and p. 315. It was for that reason, too, that Andrew Lytle, Tate, and Warren wanted to title the book "A Tract Against Communism," to stress the ideational polemic in the conflict with developmental tendencies rather than simply the aspects of agrarian revival. The early diagnosis of Stalinist Russia along a single axis as superorganization, regulation, and control, and its identification, at the extreme, with U.S. trends, provided a powerful two-pronged strategy for Agrarian agitation in the thirties: the basic position served the struggle against both the system itself and possible left alternatives to it. "The escape," Andrew Lytle wrote, "is not in socialism, in communism, or in sovietism—the three final stages industrialism must take. These change merely the manner and speed of the suicide; they do not alter its nature." Cf. "The Hind Tit," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. 203.

79. "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, pp. xiv-xv, and p. xx.

80. "Hearts and Heads," *The American Review*, II (March 1934), pp. 566-67.

81. "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. xvii.

82. "Hearts and Heads," *op.cit.*, p. 566.

83. "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. xvii.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stability. The New Deal involved the creation of political conditions for precisely that transition to a crisis free economic operation of the system; Roosevelt's strong politics carried the intervention of the neocapitalist state into the key problems of unemployment, economic motion, effective demand, and so forth.

In consequence, Ransom proposed land as the means to "stabilize our economy" against the "inherent tendency" to "overcapitalization and overproduction." "Those who have lost their places in our ordinary capitalistic society may begin all over upon the land"[84]—the land as a direct source of subsistence. He emphasized that there was too much land in the United States for a money economy; that only commercial farming was doomed, not farming as such. Of course, Ransom did not expect agrarianism to prevail over the industrial section of the United States, but thought it could flourish by its side.[85] The irony which it is important to notice here is that the kind of primary private economy with secondary commodity production that Ransom envisages requires substantial intervention of the State to direct and regulate the transformation; Ransom himself proposes a series of necessary taxation, appropriation, education, and service measures. In other words, Ransom's precapitalist program for "happy farmers" depends on the neocapitalist state. There is a coincidence of the required motions away from classical capitalism on the ontological level of social being: already at this point the Agrarian position hides a moment of accomodation which becomes fully manifest in the New Criticism.[86]

84. "The State and Land," *The New Republic*, LXX (Feb. 17, 1932), pp. 8-9.

85. "Hearts and Heads," *op.cit.*, p. 570; "The South is a Bulwark," *Scribner's Magazine*, XCIX (May 1936), p. 300. The position is linked to the call for "moral, social and economic autonomy" for the South in the "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand*, *op.cit.*, p. x.

86. It should be noted that Ransom's concerns have a real basis in the terrible plight of farmers after the first world war and in the inhuman conditions of existence of U.S. agricultural workers. The over-production of agricultural goods was a fact since the last quarter of the nineteenth century; and between 1929 and 1934 a million farmers lost their property through foreclosure (Richard O. Boyer and Herbert W. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, *op.cit.*, p. 260). In fact, the world agricultural crisis stretched back into the boom period. Between 1925 and 1934 Agricultural Malthusianism triumphed in the bourgeois world as "a permanent psychosis of agricultural over-production" (Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, *op.cit.*, I, p. 295). It is with this ideology for restricting production that Ransom's work is linked. Naturally, it distorts completely the existing relations and possibilities; it advocates a type of asceticism which, whether it comes from the right or the left, is always an ideology of inhumanity, and it renounces the great historical feature of capital, that is, the production of surplus labor beyond the minimum required for the immediate maintenance of life, the production of surplus labor, that is, "superfluous labor from the standpoint of mere use value, mere subsistence" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, *op.cit.*, p. 325). Raising the production and reproduction of social existence beyond the subsistence level is the decisive historical contribution of capitalism; in abrogating this development by turning to the forms of the past, Ransom locks his position into an ineffectual individualism and absorbs complicity in the evils he condemns. As Marx said: "In earlier stages of development, the single individual seems to be developed more fully, because he has not yet worked out his relationships in their fullness, or erected them as independent social powers and relations opposite himself. It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, *op.cit.*, p. 162).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Naturally, the Agrarians could not find any social force to embody and carry their position, that is, their program was politically empty. Without the working class, of course, no transformation of the social system is possible, and for all their outrage at the ignominies of work in a machine economy, at the brutalization and lack of dignity of factory labor, the Agrarians were no friends to the workers.[88] And while Ransom and others carried on their reactionary ideological agitation, radical popular attempts to intervene in the situation in an active, liberating way, as in the case of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in 1934, were being crushed or assimilated into the rationalization of the capitalist economy.[89] The only agency Ransom could suggest as the bearer of the Agrarian program indicates clearly the non-transferability of the Agrarian critique into the practical dimensions: "No Southerner ever dreams of heaven, or pictures his Utopia on earth, without providing room for the Democratic party. Is it really possible that the Democratic party can be held to a principle, and that principle can now be defined as agrarian, conservative, anti-industrial? It may not be impossible, after all."[90]

---

87. See Ransom, "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. xiv; "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. 23; "Hearts and Heads," *op.cit.*, p. 567; "The Aesthetic of Regionalism," *op.cit.*, p. 305.

88. At the same time that he critized the slavishness of mechanized labor, Ransom railed against the partisans of labor and attacked Communist sentimentality about the workers whom he saw as essentially simple, herdlike, and unintelligent ("What Does the South Want?" *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XII [April 1936], pp. 190-193). That is no more than could be expected from a position based in the immediacy of alienation, arguing not the recuperation but the renunciation of human productive forces, of work as man's world and self creating activity. W.T. Couch noted in 1937, in regard to the recently enacted Mississippi law that aimed to balance industry and agriculture, that the laws contained absolutely no protection for labor in regard to the kind of job, the hours of work, the conditions of labor, or the wages. No evidence of the agrarian opposition to human exploitation ("The Agrarian Romance," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXXVI [Oct. 1937], p. 421). Couch noted, too, that despite assertions that virtue derives from the soil, the Agrarians saw no virtue in the blacks and poor whites closest to the soil (*ibid.*, p. 429). While Ransom wrote that the condition of black and white tenant farmers was the "most urgent of all our permanent economic problems" and referred to the agrarian solution ("Sociology and the Black Belt," *The American Review*, IV [Dec. 1934], pp. 153-54), black and white sharecroppers were coming together in the Sharecroppers' Union and following the Populist advice to "raise less corn and more hell!" (Cf. Boyer and Morais, *Labor's Untold Story, op.cit.*, p. 264). While Edmund Wilson wrote that "to this day, the relations in the South between the landowning gentry and the Negroes are more intimate and, in a sense, more human than the relations between the mill-owner and the workers in his factory" ("Tennessee Agrarians," *The New Republic*, LXVII [July 29, 1931], p. 281), the same issue of the journal reported the murder of black people in Tallapoosa County, Alabama for meeting in the Sharecroppers' Union to protest the Scottsboro case and to press demands upon the landowners ("The Week," *The New Republic*, LXVII [July 29, 1931], p. 272). And the same issue also carried an International Labor Defense report that Tallapoosa County landlords were paying men fifty cents, women and children twenty-five cents a day for work in the fields, and had refused to supply food for the six weeks from July 1 to August 15 (*ibid.*, pp. 270-271).

89. See the very interesting article by Mark D. Naison, "The Southern Tenants' Farmers' Union and the CIO," *Radical America*, II (Sept.-Oct. 1968), pp. 36-56.

90. "Reconstructed But Unregenerate," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, pp. 26-27.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Democratic party, under Roosevelt, became instead an agency for the rationalization of the capitalist economy. The Agrarian ideological critique had failed, but the neocapitalist rationalization in part coincided with, and in part assimilated the Agrarian position. In particular, the rationalization offered a new framework from within which Ransom's New Criticism could operate comfortably. This, we shall see, meant abandoning the basic socio-economic dimensions of the position and repudiating the critique; effectively, it meant the adoption by New Critic Ransom of a theoretical comportment which Agrarian Ransom had, in advance and explicitly, abjured.

Most of the essays in *The World's Body* originate in the Agrarian period, and it is convenient and appropriate to examine them. The book was highly influential in the New Critical stage; it criticizes science, defines the nature, function, and mechanisms of the aesthetic sphere, and attempts to provide access to the concrete substantiality of objectivity by establishing the objectivity of art as a mode of cognition. The defensive polemic against science, articulated in *God Without Thunder*, is again pursued, but now through art rather than religion.[91] And the general indictment of the modern world which, as John Bradbury points out, can serve as pretext for casting off systems of reference, permits the elaboration of an aesthetic that focuses on the isolated work itself.[92] I must add, however, that during the Agrarian period this aesthetic self-reliance was only a moment in a whole of social, economic, ethical, and metaphysical concerns. When Ransom argues that poetry is a make-believe "showing what might have been," a perfect restoring to our minds "freedom and integrity" for the duration of the experience, but subsequently releasing us to the real world, again "fallen men,"[93] he is at the same time fighting an acute ideological struggle for the permanent realization of an 'aesthetic life.' The point must be stressed in a general form: on one hand, Agrarian poetics is a full preparation for New Critical poetics and carries with it an elaborate ideological baggage, developed under the pressure of a historical situation, which enters constitutively into the later constructions; on the other, the failure of the Agrarian campaign, and the New Critical relocation, manifest in not only the retraction but also the repudiation of the essential extra-aesthetic

91. In *The World's Body* (New York, 1938), p. 140, Ransom specifies the ontologically secondary character of religion, now effectively a parasite: "Religion depends for its ontological validity upon a literary understanding, and that is why it is frequently misunderstood." The modern aesthetics that blends religion and art disguises the social opposition between the two forms and contributes to weakening literary defenses. Ransom contends (p. 43) that "religion is an institution existing for the sake of its ritual," and thus provides a popular theorization for the modern phenomenon of religionists, who disclaim any adherence to religious doctrine, discovering themselves inescapably attached to religious liturgy, that is, to a form of disciplined, preconstituted communality. The phenomenon has its roots in the commotive transformation of the social metabolism.

92. *The Fugitives: A Critical Account, op.cit.*, p. 114.

93. *World's Body, op.cit.*, pp. 249-250.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dimensions, produces internal modifications and external effects that radically alter the character of the whole poetics.

The search for totality structures Ransom's poetics, as it structures the other spheres of his interests; his philosophy of art is defined in relation to the inadequacies of science. His critique of science relies on Bergson and Hume; science he argues is caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of telling less than the truth and telling more than the truth, the Bergsonian and Humean errors respectively. In the first respect, science is partial, abstract, and incomplete.[94] It is "always *a science*, and committed to a special interest" in relation to which it selects out of a manifold of properties the one relevant property;[95] it can never present the concrete whose essence is *variety*.[96] In the second respect, science assumes more "machinery," e.g., causality, than it can demonstrate. In general, science cannot embody the concrete whole and cannot deal with the contingent detail that is "irrelevant to the pattern, and distracting."[97]

This critique operates in the matrix of classical philosophy, and poses the problematic of systematic rationalization. In fact, the two aspects, scientific specialization on one hand, and contingency irreducible to lawfulness on the other, are related moments. Scientific signifiers as a whole cannot be symmetrical with the totality of signifieds; the contents of reality, especially sensuous contents, are not reducible to systematized rational form: irrationalities, inescapable contingencies always surface—content intervenes in the form and dissolves the system.[98] Lukács has shown that, in its drive towards rationality, classical philosophy avoided the impasse of this form/content contradiction only by directing its attention to partial formalizations in delimited areas "by means of abstract rational special systems," and renouncing attempts "to achieve a unified mastery of the whole realm of the knowable."[99] In Ransom's terms, the Humean problematic produced the Bergsonian.

In discussing the alienation of science, we must recall the Husserlian critique of the objectivistic outlook of modern science which substitutes for the real sensuous world a world of lawful abstract categories. Husserl traced this alienation from the initial Galilean attempts to mathematize reality to positivist scientism. Ransom's critique has important points of contact with the phenomenological critique; he protests the "ruthless reductions" of

94. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, pp. 217-232.
95. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 115.
96. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 287.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-225.
98. Contemporary structuralism, in this regard, can be seen clearly as a dogmatic ultra-rationalism that suppresses the contingent ontological field for which it substitutes a fully rationalizable epistemological field; it is upon this latter that it performs its systematic formalizations. It is to date the most precise theoretical otherness of manipulative neocapitalist rationalization.
99. *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 120.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

positivism, "the extinction of experience in the blank indifference of a universe which is not even mechanical but only mathematical." The difficulty with Ransom's position begins in that he accepts the false utilitarian rationalism of positivist scientism as inherent in science; that is, he permits to alienation in its immediacy the full and permanent occupation of the realm of the scientific project. Two immediate consequences follow: in opposition to abstraction, which in fact is a necessary mediation for reaching the concrete, he insists on elevating the experience "above any explanation" of the experience;[100] and in opposition to scientistic appetitive pragmatism he places disinterested contemplation.

Unfortunately, this position moves in the opposite direction from a necessary critique of scientistic objectivism as itself contemplative, and thus blocks the path to unalienated science; and, paradoxically, it impoverishes culture, which is not reducible to the perceptual world. Ransom's theory gets locked into an alienated utility/contemplation dialectic with disastrous consequences: creative historical praxis is not available through the ontic units of the theory for the constitution of either the ontological or the epistemological field. The "desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre"[101] sees the poem cut off from the genuine social ontology that is the basis of art. We must be aware, however, that genuine concreteness is produced and appropriated through the determinations of human social life; with Ransom we shall be confined to the immediacy of pseudo-concretions.

Ransom's strategy involves the attempt to establish art as a "deliberate career" like science, just as serious, official, studied, consecutive, difficult, and important.[102] The stress falls on the authority of objectivity; Ransom is critical of romantic expression of self "rather than object," as of modernist expression of "what is near the subject-pole of the subject-object relation."[103] In criticizing Richards, Ransom insists that the complexity resides in the object experienced rather than in the experiencing mind; it is "constitutional to nature."[104] In general, Ransom, and all the New Critics, assert again and again that poetry offers true knowledge, that it is a tough-minded intellectual activity which cannot be treated as soft or subjective emotionality.[105]

---

100. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 263.
101. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 347.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
105. In a study of a literary ideology as powerful and widespread as the New Criticism, it would be incorrect to neglect relating the positions to the key U.S. ideological structures of sexism, racism, and national chauvinism. The racism has been fully evident through the examination of Agrarian writings. National chauvinism is powerful enough to emerge in Ransom, in spite of sectional allegiances and a posture of internal polarization, as soon as it can come to a question of comparing the United States to any other country. He advocates converting foreign war credits into a vast educational fund for those U.S. nationals to study

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The real problem with this form of emphasis on the intellectual cognitive elements of art is the distortion produced in the subject/object relation by the implied presupposition that the concrete world is independent, pre-constituted, and available to the contemplative subject. But knowledge is not contemplation, and objectivity, as Antonio Gramsci argued, except from the point of view of transcendence, always means human objectivity and is always a moment of "a struggle towards objectivity."[106] The contem-

---

abroad who will use their opportunities "wisely and patriotically" ("Shall We Complete the Trade?" *The Sewanee Review*, XLI, April 1933, p. 187); he proposes the erection of a new capital city that is defined as "larger, more modern, and more beautiful than any city on earth" ("A Capital for the New Deal," *The American Review*, II, Dec. 1933, p. 136); he considers that the United States is better able than any other human society "to afford the luxury of freedom" ("The South Is a Bulwark," *op.cit.*, p. 301); and what he wants to achieve with the whole Agrarian program is "farmers with more room, and more heart, than most of the farmers of the world" ("Happy Farmers," *op.cit.*, p. 531). All three ideologies fit easily into a binary typology appropriate to Ransom's dualism, but perhaps the masculine-feminine duality does so most conveniently. It is to be noted that it occupies an important place in Ransom's work; sexism becomes conceptually structural in some essays in concentrating dichotomies and criticisms, that is, sexist ideology becomes an important mode of articulation and reproduction for Ransom's reactionary philosophical dualism. To return to the question of intellectuality, Ransom explains, in an extraordinary essay entitled "The Poet As Woman" (*World's Body, op.cit.*, pp. 76-110), that, in comparison to men, women are "indifferent to intellectuality" (p. 78). Indeed, Edna St. Vincent Millay's limitation is "her lack of intellectual interest. It is that which the male reader misses in her poetry, even though he may acknowledge the authenticity of the interest which is there. I used a conventional symbol, which I hope was not objectionable, when I phrased this lack of hers: deficiency in masculinity" (p. 98). Intellect is clearly identified, *a priori*, as masculine; even empirical evidence cannot challenge this "conventional" formulation. If some male poets are not intellectual, they yield to "feminine exercise"; if some women poets are intellectual, they have some masculine characteristics. On one hand, the sexist categories are used structurally; on the other, they are sexually identified: women "are not strict enough and expert enough to manage forms" (p. 103); and no "obligation can lie upon the male adult requiring him to assist at this sort of thing" (p. 104). The view of femininity as an absence, a lack, a deficiency, as in Freud, is not only vicious, but indicates another area of the invariably reactionary Freudian interventions in modern critical theory. Two more examples from Ransom: in "The South—Old or New?" *op.cit.*, pp. 140-142, Progress and Service are the masculine and feminine forms of materialistic ambition: mastery and seduction respectively; and in "Flux and Blur in Contemporary Art," *op.cit.*, p. 365, a listing of formless and meaningless works of art is described as "feminine rather than masculine." It is informative to compare. Tate, somewhat kinder to Emily Dickinson than Ransom to Millay, probes "her intellectual deficiency" (*Essays of Four Decades, op.cit.*, p. 291); decides "she cannot reason at all. She can only see" (p. 289). His essay on his friend ("Hart Crane: The Poet as Hero," *Essays, op.cit.*, pp. 324-328) is a murderously sexist discourse on homosexuality and the "victims" of homosexual "neurosis" (p. 325). And elsewhere (*Essays, op.cit.*, p. 555) Tate says, without any self-consciousness: "The woman in Mr. Eliot's poem [*The Waste Land*] is, I believe, the symbol of man at the present time." As early as 1925, in *The Fugitive*, Robert Penn Warren criticizes Joseph Anslander's poetry for emotionality, lack of "cerebration," "feminine exaggeration" (cited in Cowan, *The Fugitive Group, op.cit.*, p. 190). Later, Warren and another Fugitive, Alfred Starr, dispute whether women are the highest form of "amusement" (Starr) or "bemusement" (Warren): *Fugitives' Reunion: Conversations at Vanderbilt, May 3-5, 1956*, ed. Rob Roy Purdy (Nashville, 1959), p. 69. And a last quotation from a major critic outside the present group (F.O. Matthiessen, "American Poetry, 1920-40," p. 50), in regard to Marianne Moore: "She is feminine in a very rewarding sense, in that she makes no effort to be major." The ideology runs wide and deep, and surprisingly explicit in this tradition. It must be fought.

106. *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York, 1957), p. 106.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plative comportment, Ransom's false alternative to alienated utilitarianism, demands its appropriate object, and finds it in a stabilized nature "having its own existence."[107] Ransom's ontology sets the individual of everyday life face to face with nature and, therefore, necessarily conceives the subject/object relation as cognitive. The position is itself a product of the reified social relations of capitalist society; its irony is that Ransom's aesthetic thus takes as its structure the same objectivistic-naturalistic attitude that distinguishes alienated science.

For Ransom there are two modes of "formal cognition," "two ways of transcribing nature": science graphs its universal relations, art "makes imitations or full representations of nature."[108] A key to the notion of cognition involved is the view that "the things are constant, and it is the ideas that change—changing according to the latest mode under which the species indulges its grandiose expectation of subjugating nature."[109] The strategy of opposing a realist objectivism as aesthetic functionality against the privacy of subjectivist symbolizations results in this dualist separation of the object from the categorical modes of its appropriation; this independence of the object is the basis for a thoroughgoing empiricism that becomes most explicit in New Critical practice. The exclusion of historical praxis from Ransom's aesthetics leads to positing a meaningless objectivity. The truth that art deals with the man-nature metabolism is falsified once that relation is abstracted from the social metabolism. Nature exists for us only in its socio-historical appropriation, and art depicts, not nature, but the human experience of nature, that is, nature as a moment in the totality of the social life of human beings: its reference is human peculiarity (*Besonderheit*). Art is not science; it is always subjectivity which is determinant in poetry, not the bare object in which it recognizes itself.[110] The task of literature to depict man without fetishes, to make sensible the socio-historical human essence, to objectify and make possible the appropriation of the memory and self-consciousness of human development, is precluded in Ransom's poetics. What takes its place is a phenomenology whose role is to reconcile us with the established reality through the worship of the facticity of things, to teach us that "the way to obtain the true *Dinglichkeit*. . . is to approach the object as such, and in humility,"[111] that "knowledge is appreciation."[112]

Of course, Ransom is aware that art is anthropomorphic, but the persistent subject/object duality of his empiricist attempts to justify the ways of

107. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 45.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
110. See György Lukács, *Az esztétikum sajátossága* [*The Specificty of the Aesthetic*], trans. Istvan Eorsi (Budapest, 1965), II, p. 592. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 563-626; *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 234.
111. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 124.
112. *God Without Thunder, op.cit.*, p. 216.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art as contraposed to alienated science produce a paradox that haunts the poetics: objectivism turns into its corollary subjectivism. In art alone, anthropomorphism is not subjectivist; intensive subjectivity unites with intensive objectivity through the homogeneous medium. But Ransom posits a two-step process for the cognition of the world as particularity. The first step, the primary order of poetry, is a perceptual reportage of the "objects in detail without ever exceeding actual observation;" this, he says, is analogous to painting. Next, poetry goes beyond painting, beyond visibility (and here, of course, is the idealist error which mistakes a homogeneous medium, that concentrates all aspects of life, for a limited field of sensory appropriation), and "animates nature," investing organic and inorganic forms "with his own mentality."[113] The gratuity of this object-directed increment to the base of scientifically verifiable observation reveals the transformation of artistic anthropomorphism, and of the theoretical truth that we know objects only under historically created human categories, into empiricist subjectivism.

In general, the acceptance of science as the defining frame of reference for the construction of a poetics leads to a categorical error. While 'cognition' is the adequate category for comprehending the specificity of science, and finds in science its most appropriate methodology, it is not the adequate category for grasping the specificity of art, although art does contain cognitive elements. What is crucial is that art always refers to the subject, that the immediacy it puts in place of everyday immediacy is that of generic self-consciousness, that the world it makes available is a defetishized world of rich potentialities made sensible at a concrete nodal point in human historical development. And the point is that in presenting this human essence as immediate human existence, art offers to raise both the artist and the receiver above the level of the particularized everyday world. It is not a question here of the idealist reproduction of the world's body, or of a full and preconstituted non-alienated reality: art is the objectification of a non-reified relation to the world—a non-reified relation which exists for and is lived by the aesthetic subjectivity in both creating and appropriating the aesthetic world.

This defetishizing function of genuine art, which is not simply looking behind the veil, or filling in variety and body, involves a collision with everyday subjectivity. Lukács has established that all genuine art involves this cathartic collision, that it is based on the generic value hierarchy appropriated in the artistic construction which serves as a standard against which everyday life is critically measured, and, hence, that it carries the imperative to change one's life. In other words, the elevation beyond the everyday happens in the artistic catharsis, and art, precisely because of the specificity of the self-contained aesthetic world, can influence human life. As Lukács notes, catharsis shows the individual, in the mirror of the generic essence,

113. *World's Body, op.cit.*, pp. 158-159.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fragility and heterogeneity of his normal life, incapable of realizing itself in coherent fullness. Catharsis is a liberating shock where the individual affirms this generic essence in his own life.[114] (It is, I cannot emphasize too strongly, this experience which is ideologically reduced in all bourgeois formalist aesthetics to 'formal-technical perfection' contrasted with unformed life.) In other words, the contrast of the cathartic experience with ordinary experience is the means to the possibility of transition from aesthetics to ethics.

Ransom's aesthetic theory is completely unable and unwilling to come to terms with this crucial finality of art; it takes refuge in the pristine positivity of prolonged contemplative cognition. The contemplative attitude and catharsis are irreconcilable, and Ransom identifies catharsis as the agency that prepares for scientific-utilitarian efficiency, the enemy of the simple mimesis that he takes to mean "the love of nature."[115] Although the analysis, as always, derives its impetus from the negative relation to science, its result is that catharsis, the truth of aesthetic mimesis, is posited as its antagonist. Ransom's assumptions are like a distorting mirror, and the closer he comes to the aesthetic object in that mirror, the farther away he moves from it in reality.[116]

The notion that art is imitation is of central importance to Ransom. Not only does it stress the object, but it founds the interpretation of disinterested cognition: "not being actual, it cannot be used, it can only be known." In this respect, art is actually better than nature, which is "an object both to knowledge and to use." "As science more and more completely reduces the world to its types and forms, art, replying, must invest it again with body. The one technical process requires the other. The artist resorts to the imitation because it is inviolable, and it is inviolable because it is not real."[117] In *The World's Body*, the scientific habit of mind is no longer as clearly the symbol of 'industrialism' as in *God Without Thunder*; in consequence, the general idealism of the position is much more apparent. If the world of objectivity cannot resist the scientific aggression, artistic imitation becomes indispensable because it not only can, being "one degree removed from actuality," but can even save the world and restore its body, being faithful to the phenomenal world.[118] The claims made for art, typically in this tradition, are vast and outrageous; the cost of this particular strategy which relies on the hypertrophy of 'knowledge without desire' is the insulation of art from the active life of normal existence.

Of course, a certain disinterest is involved in the aesthetic suspension of

---

114. Lukács, *Aesthetics, op.cit.*, II, p. 368.
115. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 210.
116. Cf. Christopher Caudwell's "mirror revolutionaries," *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (New York, 1937), p. 90.
117. *World's Body, op.cit.*, pp. 196-198.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the pragmatic teleologies of everyday immediacy, but the exaggeration of this moment entails the idealist distortion of essential features of art. On one hand, such a position ignores the change effected in the recipient's comportment with respect to reality by the surrender the homogeneous medium enforces to the formed content of the work. This change puts an end to the disinterest within the aesthetic sphere, regardless of how elaborately mediated the subsequent effect may be, depending as it does on the needs and experiences of the recipient before and after the appropriation of the aesthetic experience. On the other, the aesthetic experience has an effect in human life beyond the experience itself, an effect which devolves from the essence of art. This social significance of art has long been recognized and established, and it is a regression to dismiss it, to neglect it, or to retain it suitably modified to accord with the cult of disinterest.[119] In general, the separation of the object from the modes and nature of its appropriation and reception is an expression of the triumph of commodity fetishism over aesthetic defetishization.

In Ransom, the fetish of disinterested contemplative cognition truncates the dialectic at the point of suspension of pragmatic immediacy; memory and form are the two agencies that make it possible to establish the required aesthetic distance. The two combine the romantic and neoclassical traditions to effect a poetics which, in the absence of a future orientation, reconciles its own radical potentialities with the given present. Ransom blends Wordsworth, Bergson, Proust, and Freud in a psychology that serves his aesthetics. The general idea is that aesthetic experience is compelled by recollection; it is "based on second love, not first love."[120] Our attention in the first experience of reality is dominated by the scientific-practical drive for efficiency; the fullness of sensibility is registered "only upon the faithful and disregarded camera of memory."[121] The "body and solid substance of the world" can be found only in "the fulness [sic] of memory, but out of this we construct the fulness of poetry, which is counterpart to the world's fulness;"[122] and, since memory itself "is relegated to the dark, or the unconscious...the poet's intention becomes the intention of finding access to the unconscious. It takes a poet to find it."[123]

We should note that Freudianism is generally brought into the modern critical tradition as a means for finding either permanent typologies or levels of signification which offer an escape from the history that has to be made; the powerful subversive possibilities are presupposed. In this instance memory could be a radical category. Memory not only conquers

119. For brief discussions of Kantian "disinterestedness,' see Lukács, *Aesthetics, op.cit.*, I, pp. 270, 750-51.
120. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 116.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
122. *Ibid.*, p. x.
123. "The Making of a Modern: The Poetry of George Marion O'Donnell," *The Southern Review*, I (Spring 1936), p. 872.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the separation of the external and internal world, but it conquers time as well. It could yield, Marcuse says, "critical standards which are tabooed by the present."[124] It could explode the rationality of repression; regression could be progressive. But this is not possible in Ransom's dissociation-totality problematic: the poet's search for the "way back to those whole states of mind in which the world is originally experienced, and from which every pure intellectual achievement had to take its start"[125] is merely the defensive manoeuvre of a regressive phenomenology that will not struggle with the problems of the present and has no perspective on the future. The truncation of the aesthetic dialectic at the point of contemplation makes the conquest of time false and meaningless, since it cannot pass to the mediation of activity in time, and therefore will not supersede the boundaries of the present.

The same situation arises in the case of artistic form, the means of realization of the inviolable imitation based in the fullness of memory. Where the Russian formalists emphasized the subversive aspects of form, here the stress is on its conservative aspects as another moment of order. "The aesthetic forms are a technique of restraint;" through the restraints of forms, codes, rituals, conventions which prevent immediacy (whether in art, manners, or religion), we come "to respect the object." Form impedes the natural man from hurting or disrespecting the object; in other words, it precludes intervention in objectivity. "The object of a proper society is to instruct its members how to transform instructive experience into aesthetic experience;" the word for our generation, Ransom ventures, is "formal" and "reactionary." Artistic form is the body the poet gives to his passions; it is the means to the innocent knowledge of the world's body for its own sake in all its contingency.[126]

Ransom has been criticized for limiting cognition to fidelity of perceptual representation and ignoring the artist's selective, interpretative contribution.[127] Meanwhile, Cleanth Brooks has stressed that the poet is a *maker* not a *copyist*, that his mirror is a "distortion mirror" that brings focus.[128] But Ransom's poetics in fact resolves this problem; his poet is both maker and mimetic. If both ordinary and scientific perception distort, then the poetic imitation of what is for Ransom the real world of fullness has the poet in the role of maker since art refocuses and restores. And he states that technical form orders the thing-content, develops it beyond being "a solid lump."[129]

---

124. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1961), p. 18.
125. "The Making of a Modern," *op.cit.*, p. 872.
126. *World's Body*, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-45.
127. John L. Stewart, *John Crowe Ransom*, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers No. 18 (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 44; John M. Bradbury, *The Fugitives: A Critical Account*, *op.cit.*, p. 130.
128. *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-12.
129. *World's Body*, *op.cit.*, pp. 119-120.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Aesthetic form for Ransom always opposes the scientific; this recalls the problematic in classical philosophy of a systematic rationalization. Artistic form seemed uniquely able to unite contingency and necessity, and the problem insoluble for formal rationalism was referred to it. Art became a cornerstone of Kant's system, a crucial moment of the search for totality. And, as Lukács showed, the Schillerian extension of the aesthetic principle beyond art was a contradictory attempt to solve social fragmentation by mental reconstruction.[130] Ransom, in effect, operates in this matrix but he now divides the Kantian complementarity and turns art and science into opposing moments. The search for totality by Ransom's contemplative subject in the fullness of sensibility leaves the other two thirds of the Kantian triad, theoretical and practical reason, alienated; Ransom's trajectory moves through the available forms of established culture. The real fullness and totality that have to be created against the established realities through the historical praxis of the concrete historical subject are inaccessible to Ransom; neither that subject nor that praxis is available within the terms of his theoretical construction. At least the Agrarian strategic complex involves the prospect of a pseudo-totality appropriate to the contemplative subject; in the New Critical resolution, art becomes a partial sphere among other partial spheres.

Sentiment is an important concept for Ransom; it is the point of contact between the capabilities of the ordinary person and the artist. Like Richards, Ransom is unable to differentiate adequately between the everyday and the aesthetic. "Sentiment is the totality of love and knowledge which we have of an object that is private and unique;" it is responsible for a "vast increment of diffuse and irrelevant sensibilia" which obstruct science and action.[131] The specification of value in terms of "irrelevance" expresses the defensive negation of the prevailing rationality; in the New Critical phase its domain will be progressively invaded by that rationality. The formal arts and sentiments are "alternative forms of aesthetic knowledge;" the differences lie mainly in the smaller volume of the former, the greater explicitness of its knowledge, and the intense concentration needed to produce it versus the fairly universal and less precise character of of the latter. Sentimental knowledge of the object "simply grows."[132]

The exclusion from aesthetic theory of the concrete connections between the individual and the society, of the cathartic elevation from the everyday heterogeneity, through the medium, to the homogeneity of generic immediacy, leaves no grounds for differentiating between two forms of contemplative subjectivity. We should note that this position prepares for the subsequent spectaclist aesthetic practice which is incompatible with catharsis since it will not admit the imperative to change.

130. *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 139.
131. *World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 36.
132. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ransom writes: "Love, respect, tenderness, fixation upon the object, all these terms would define an attitude in subjective or emotional terms, but they mean nothing until we study what we are really trying to do with the object. We are only trying to know it as a complete or individual object; and, as a corollary undoubtedly, to protect it against our other and predatory kind of knowledge which would reduce it to its mere utility. Sentiment is aesthetic, aesthetic is cognitive, and the cognition is of the object as an individual. And this, I imagine, is all the mystery that will be discovered in sentiment."[133] We find here again the characteristic irony of the contemplative objectivity of Agrarian poetics; it turns into an aesthetic subjectivism, a psychology. All the stress on fullness has failed to specify the aesthetic object; the aesthetic relates and refers to an attitude in opposition to the scientific. Whether he calls it appreciation or sentimentality, or enjoyment or celebration or love or respect or humility, whether he defines it as disinterestedness or desirelessness, Ransom is describing a mental approach to the object, a psychology. Everything, by virtue of its infinite fullness, can become an aesthetic object if only we have the right attitude to it: a position of pure empiricist subjectivism.

Ransom's subjectivist stress on attitudes expresses an absence of objective norms, a lack of social location. The discovery of a new social location in the New Critical period produces a new type of stress on the object, a new localized criticism, and a deepening of reified scientism. It is the sentiments, Ransom writes, which keep us "up to the decent level of our historicl humanity:"[134] once the Agrarian social matrix is gone, the New Critical period is left with an ideology of submission and an abstract humanism based in an integrated, object-dependent sensibility.

IV. *New Criticism*

The New Criticism dates from the latter part of the thirties; the failure of Agrarianism was followed by the abandonment of the Southern problematic along with the neoromantic absolutist comportment, and led to the empiricist submission to the possibilities available within the given historical forms for the realization of the project of the sensibility. This meant the discovery of a new geographical and social location and involved the move to the North and the development of a program and an institutional basis providing a place for art and a place for its proponents appropriate to the historical commotion. Ransom was the decisive figure of this transition. While Tate, for example, retained for a long time the posture of absolutist reaction and wound up in the arms of the Catholic Church, Ransom, who had since the Fugitive days always been less doctrinaire and tortured, was able to lead the integration under the categories of secular authority, make peace with the prevailing rationality, and prepare the theo-

133. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

retical ground for the literary technicism corresponding to the Keynesian technicism that was transforming social life. Ransom recalls that after the "red fury" of Agrarianism had subsided, he lived without harm in a "minority pocket of the culture," that is, "educational institutions, with pockets of 'humanities', whose interest has identified itself increasingly with ours," publishers, and so forth.[135] It is important to remember the joint growth of, on one hand, the institutional power of critical theory, involving, with the rise of mass education and mass culture, a broad and dense fabric of educational and journalistic interrelations, positions, and influence, with control over decisions affecting the direction, orientation, and priorities of a whole field, and, on the other, the great ideological influence of a key system of reference for notions of our relations to the objective world, to other people, and to ourselves. In this context we can agree with Louise Cowan that the "greatest impact" of the New Critics "has been in establishing a profession of letters;"[136] and I must add a point well known to historians of science,[137] that this professionalization is linked with both the immense restriction of vision and the consequent precision of detail that are characteristic of New Criticism.

On the programmatic side, we should notice the beginning, in the post-Agrarian essay in *The World's Body*, "Criticism, Inc.," of a new focus on criticism itself, increasingly fleshed in as an independent entity that can stand as the object of attention. The critical project is empiricist, non-differentiating and non-optive: the critic is to deal with both the prose core and the "totality of connotation." Within the context of the "first law" of criticism that it must focus on the nature of the object and identify the poetic "ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre," criticism involves the technical study of poetic devices.[138]

There is a general insistence in the New Critical period that priority belongs to the poetic object, not to its effect; that the poem is autonomous, closed, self-contained, complete, contemplated as a pattern of knowledge. Only "the hardest close analysis of the actual poems," Ransom writes, can establish their content.[139] The New Criticism is a specifically "literary criticism,"[140] that is, in contrast with the "business of the moralist," "the business of the literary critic is exclusively with an esthetic criticism."[141]

---

135. "In Amicitia," *The Sewanee Review*, LXVII (Oct. 1959), pp. 534, 536.
136. *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History*, *op.cit.*, p. xix.
137. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962), pp. 64-65.
138. *World's Body*, *op.cit.*, pp. 342-348.
139. "The Irish, The Gaelic, The Byzantine," *The Southern Review*, VII (Winter 1942), p. 541.
140. *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn., 1941), p. 216.
141. "Criticism as Pure Speculation," *The Intent of the Critic*, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (Princeton, 1941), pp. 101-102.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ransom rejects the "shapeless miscellany of all prior criticism" and expects that the New Criticism, as a kind of collaborative effort, will arrive at something "radically new, and fertile" and "proportionately as definitive" as the new physics or the new logic.[142] In every crucial respect, these statements point in the direction of the development of bourgeois scientific formalism. Moreover, Ransom's theoretical program is consciously linked with a program of institutional entrenchment to provide its social location.[143]

Ransom's new rationalism is in sharp contrast with his Agrarian posture; and the changes Ransom prepared far exceeded his own inclinations. By 1952, he has to report not only that "in the academy the verbal analysis has pretty well secured its place and tenure" but also that it has "bogged down" in an "excruciating impasse: with cold-blooded critics of poetry working away at what sometimes appear to be the merest exercises with words."[144] By the latter fifties, the New Criticism was being displaced by

---

142. "Ubiquitous Moralists," *The Kenyon Review*, III (Winter 1941), p. 95.

143. In 1937: "the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals": "criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons—which means that its proper seat is in the universities" (*World's Body, op.cit.*, p. 329). In 1939, in the opening issue of *The Kenyon Review*: "The colleges have really not had an available body of critical theory to teach. But now it is the Age of Criticism" ("The Teaching of Poetry," *The Kenyon Review*, I [Winter 1939], p. 81). And in 1940, having put the case for the study of "the structure and mode of construction of the object" against the "official policy of the professors" ("Mr. Tate and the Professors," *The Kenyon Review*, II [Summer 1940], pp. 349-50), Ransom contends that a "tough, scientific" critical attitude must take the place of the "nearly accomplished" historical, linguistic, and editorial work of orthodox literary scholarship: "I should think that the future of the professorship of literature is immense. But that is because I judge that the revolution will presently occur, rather peacefully and in the course of nature, and the professors start in upon a new order of studies: the speculative or critical ones" ("Strategy for English Studies," *The Southern Review*, VI [Autumn 1940], pp. 235, 226-227).

144. "Poets and Flatworms," *The Kenyon Review*, XIV (Winter, 1952), p. 159. I must simply record some institutional moments of the rise of New Criticism. In 1939, Ransom moved to Ohio and founded *The Kenyon Review* (discontinued in 1970) which he edited for twenty years (until his retirement in 1959) as a permanent manifesto of the New Criticism. The whole Kenyon College complex, with the *Review*, "The Kenyon Review Fellowships," and "The Kenyon School of English" provided a central base to focus the efforts of an increasingly powerful literary movement under the general shaping influence of Ransom whose books and articles offered a theoretical foundation, as well as a name, to the New Criticism. The sessions of the Kenyon School of English in the late forties brought together a glittering list of critics. The following is a list, from an advertisement at the beginning of Vol. XI (1949) of *The Kenyon Review*, of the fellows for the Second Session from June 23 to August 6, 1949. Senior Fellows: F.O. Matthiessen, John Crowe Ransom, Lionel Trilling. Fellows: Eric Bentley, Richard Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, Kenneth Burke, Richard Chase, William Empson, Alfred Kazin, L.C. Knights, Robert Lowell, Philip Rahv, Herbert Read, Philip Blair Rice, Mark Schorer, Allen Tate, Austin Warren, Robert Penn Warren, Rene Wellek, Basil Willey, Yvor Winters, Morton Dauwen Zabel. Several other journals constituted additional means of production under New Critical control, the most important being *The Hudson Review* (from 1948), *The Sewanee Review*, which Allen Tate edited from 1944 to 1946, and *The Southern Review*, founded by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in 1935 following the death, in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mythological structuralism, but its program of technological positivism and its advocates remain entrenched at various levels of the field.

By the end of the forties, New Criticism could be found in most of the literary reviews. During this period, too, New Criticism succeeded in effecting an educational transformation and became established as the dominant pedagogic tradition.[145] On the whole, New Critical institutional penetration of the ideological realm through teaching, literary journals, and publications of theoretical, practical critical, and pedagogic interest, provided a broad and solid structural basis for the diffusion of ideology.

Characteristically, the novelty of the new position is most clearly manifest in the attitude to science which, in terms of the ontic structure of Ransom's work, is always the determining feature, in that science represents for him the dominant form of social rationality. We find that, compared to earlier positions, a new balance is offered: "The scientific and aesthetic ways of knowledge should illuminate each other; perhaps they are alternative knowledges, and a preference for one knowledge over the other might indicate an elemental or primary bias in temperament."[146] Gone is the urgency of the differentiation between man and animal, gone the crisis of civilization; the whole framework of the opposition is drastically reduced to the level of discourse where, although the issue of the difference cannot be dodged, Ransom declines to "ride either hobby, the scientific or the literary."[147] Poetry still tells us more about the world than science "needs to tell," but "this truth is not unfriendly to science nor need it be fatal to the practical structure."[148]

The new formulations aim to preserve much of the substance of the developed poetics, while neutralizing its critical form, its moments of negativity. This distinction must be, of course, strictly heuristic; to contain the critique, Ransom has to penetrate even to the most essential feature of his poetics, the Schopenhauerian contemplative poetic knowledge without desire. "That doctrine also seems too negative and indeterminate."[149] The positive version of the doctrine stresses the "increment of meaning" in art, without stressing the combat with science. In general, Ransom moves from a conflict model to a functional complementarity model, ideologically adequate to the integrative tendencies of the historical commotion. On one

---

previous year, of *Hound & Horn*, which Richard Blackmur had edited in 1929, and of which Yvor Winters and Tate were regional editors in 1931. *The Southern Review* was absorbed into *The Kenyon Review* in 1942.

145. It is generally accepted that the vastly influential textbooks published by the New Critics (widely welcomed, used, and imitated) deserve credit for this, especially Cleanth Brooks's successful anthologies.

146. *New Criticism, op.cit.*, p. 294.

147. *A College Primer of Writing, op.cit.*, p. iv.

148. *New Criticism, op.cit.*, p. 43.

149. "Criticism as Pure Speculation," *op.cit.*, p. 103.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand, in seeking at the expense of his "old-line education" to conceive human activities "naturalistically," that is to look, not for social, but for biotic motivations, Ransom increasingly views art as a secondary or 'leisure' interest which promises "not to interfere with the organic interests, which are primary."[150] On the other, he comes to declare himself opposed to rescuing the 'humanities' by disparaging the natural and social sciences, both valuable and humane forms of our adaptation to nature and to society.[151] The relation of art to scientific-practical life is fully pacified. "Poetry is an organic-and-inorganic activity; first and last it is organic, or Positive and in the service of the organism; in between, but discreetly and in less than subversive measure, it is inorganic, or unrelated to the organic interest. It has a commanding identity with prose, and a radical but not inimical difference."[152]

Biological models applied to social forms always carry an implicit bias towards the positivity of the established order; Ransom makes the inclination explicit. At a time when Tate is still explicitly rejecting the successes of public education in teaching adjustment to the given society,[153] Ransom proposes "to have commerce with the world," impressed by the "honesty" of the positivist forces of social construction. He also claims to "admire the moderns for the honesty and rigor of their analytical methods."[154] The most illuminating formulation of the new comportment is in a letter to Tate dated May 23, 1941: "I am forced to regard poetic theory as science, though a new science, because about a new or 'different' kind of discourse. That's why I don't want any taboos, restrictions, philosophical censorship, against the analytic work. If that is positivism, I guess I'm a member of the tribe. But so far as the absurd emphasis on scientific discourse as the only discourse goes, I'm far from being one."[155]

We should now be in a position to locate this change in comportment as the commotive specificity of New Critical ideology. What Ransom's new position means is not the obliteration of earlier antirationalist poetics; it means the transplantation of neoromantic irrationality onto the new ground of neocapitalist scientistic rationality. It means, therefore, precisely the assimilation of all critical moments; they are integrated and contained.

It is important to understand that if an earlier sharp antagonism can now take the form of a docile, contained antinomy, then the ontological basis of this containment, that is, a location within the social integration, has been accepted. Again, we must refer the New Critical world to the Agrarian. The

150. "The Inorganic Muses," *The Kenyon Review*, V (Spring 1943), p. 284 and p. 291.
151. "Short Notice: The Rebirth of Liberal Education by Fred B. Millett," *The Kenyon Review*, VIII (Winter 1946), p. 176.
152. "The Inorganic Muses," *op.cit.*, p. 293.
153. "The Present Function of Criticism," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 199.
154. "Art Needs a Little Separating," *The Kenyon Review*, VI (Winter 1944), p. 118.
155. Cited in Stewart, *The Burden of Time*, *op.cit.*, p. 309.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

passivity and submissiveness of Agrarian poetics was contradictory; it retained a critical aspect in relation to a reality as long as it was held within the broader Agrarian project of a different reality. In one sense, its passivitv was a withdrawal from the given reality, and its submission was to the alternative that was to be made available through the aesthetic life. The New Critical retraction, the repudiation of the broad Agrarian social matrix, retains the passivity and submission only as a surrender to the existing alienation.

The Agrarian Donald Davidson writes: "Harmony between the artist and society must be regained; the dissociation must be broken down. That can only be done, however, by first putting society itself in order."[156] And, in sharp contrast to the educational program of the New Criticism and of the subsequent tradition, the Agrarian Ransom explicitly rejects education as a solution to the problems. As he further elaborates: "The trouble with the life-pattern is to be located at its economic base, and we cannot rebuild it by pouring in soft materials from the top.... Humanism, properly speaking, is not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition... We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question the contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground." [7] By contrast, the New Critical Ransom abdicates the social critique, forgets the anaesthesia of scientific machine efficiency, and reduces a profound problematic to the typically modern fetish of language abstracted from material reality: "I cannot think the difficulties are social, or economic, or material, for these difficulties are perennial. It is true that we have plenty of trouble adjusting to an Age of Machines, but it hardly paralyzes us. I find myself more and more imagining that the epochal thing that has happened to us is a sudden crisis of language and expression."[158]

And, in this period, Ransom goes even further than this in renouncing the possibilities of supersession. He adopts the view that progress is irreversible and considers a return to an agrarian economy "a heavy punishment." Art and science, he argues, would have been impossible without the division of labor, and he accepts the identity of the specific form of the capitalist division of labor and the general form of socio-economic advance. In consequence, he is satisfied that there should be in society a few men "strong enough to complete their experience eventually" and hence be able to produce art. The project of creating the conditions of possibility for everyone to complete his experience has been abandoned as impossible

156. "A Mirror for Artists," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, p. 50.
157. "Introduction: A Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand, op.cit.*, pp. xv-xvi.
158. "On the 'Brooks-MacLeish Thesis'," *Partisan Review*, IX (Jan.-Feb. 1942), pp. 40-41.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fantasy: he sees no way back, and he has at no time been able to conceive a way ahead to a genuinely liberating and fulfilling future.

So the position is this: specialized labor "has become our second nature;" salvation comes through art. "In the forms which this salvation takes, we do go back into our original innocence, but vicariously or symbolically, not really. We cannot actually go back, and if we try it the old estate becomes insupportable." Works of art (or religious exercises) are "compensatory concretions" to help us "manage as we are:" "they return to primitive experience but only formally; by no means do they propose to abandon the forward economy."[159]

It is important to understand the historical meaning of this New Critical humanism. Ransom's values have not had to change; once the alienated reality is eternalized, the die is decisively cast and all critical values from an earlier opposition take on a different significance. The attempt to affirm values within an alienated totality without attempting to explode that alienation simply reinforces the alienation and, in this case, subordinates the realm of aesthetic humanism to the reified categories of neocapitalist production relations. Values need not be abrogated; they can be incorporated. This is the strategy of a tendentiously one-dimensional social formation, and Ransom's self-satisfied assertion that the former Agrarians are now "defending the freedom of the arts whose function they understand"[160] expresses the New Critical surrender to that strategy.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the bourgeois sanctification of humanist symbolization denies humanism in the flesh. The romantic specialist reduction of culture to art already involved a moment of positivity in bracketing the realization of imaginative culture as a whole way of life. It needs to be noted here that New Critical specialization as professional defenders of art[161] is a second order specialization that reintegrates the position assumed by the romantics in the capitalist division of labor. This position was assumed during the grand bifurcation of the historical practice of the social formation and is now reintegrated into the neocapitalist corporate functionalization of different social spheres on the grounds of the unifying commotive positivity.

There remains only to consider the scientistic aspect of New Critical specialization. The stress on scientific analysis in an intrinsic aesthetic criticism is a rationalization of artificially isolated partial functions which are made autonomous and isolated from other partial functions. In the process of this specialization, totality is not reached but destroyed; the new

159. "Art and the Human Economy," *The Kenyon Review*, VII (Autumn 1945), pp. 683-88, especially pp. 658-86.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 687.

161. Donald Davidson, *Fugitives' Reunion, op.cit.*, p. 181, recalls that the Agrarians defended and sought an order of life where politics, economics, and poetry were not separated; the modern "separation of them into specialties" is what destroys poetry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'scientific' sphere is from the start a fetish, an internally coherent formal system that is also increasingly abstract and empty. As an alienated special system it is a specific alienation with its specific alienated language and methodology; the New Criticism even develops its specific vocabulary.[162] The stress is on the integrity of the object, but since bourgeois-scientific integralism is arbitrary, New Critical analysis is exclusive, not inclusive, and remains so in the development of the formalist paradigm through the tradition.

The Agrarian Ransom had criticized science for being always *a* science, hence partial. The New Criticism is now open to the same critique. The more developed and established the New Criticism with its subsequent tradition becomes, the more it happens that "the world lying beyond its confines, and in particular the material base which it is its task to understand, *its own concrete underlying reality* lies, methodologically and in principle, *beyond its grasp.*"[163] Such a scientific comportment is necessarily tied to reified reality; it is a positive study of forms in abstraction from their real essence. This is the irony of Ransom's 'ontological criticism': the fetish of immanent moments of form occludes the real art object—reality relation and cuts the criticism off from its genuine ontological problematic.

"The differentia of poetry as discourse is an ontological one. It treats an order of existence, a grade of objectivity, which cannot be treated in scientific discourse... Poetry intends to recover the denser and more refractory original world which we know loosely through our perceptions and memories. By this supposition it is a kind of knowledge which is radically or ontologically distinct."[164] With this view of poetry as a language in the service of the phenomenological immedciacy of everyday perception, Ransom defines poetic signs as iconic signs which, as signs, refer to objects, but as iconic signs also "resemble and imitate these objects."[165] Iconic discourse embodies whole, concrete objects, including their value properties *inter alia*, and necessarily involves indeterminacy since the embodied particulars always exceed definition.

The link between Ransom's view of the poetic function and his influential call for an ontological criticism that is to gain access to the substance of poetry through a study of its structures is the notion that the structure of poetry resembles the structure of the world. This point has been controversial and often criticized.[166] Yet this most important point in

---

162. See William Elton, "A Glossary of the New Criticism," *op.cit.*
163. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 104.
164. *New Criticism, op.cit.*, p. 281.
165. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
166. Yvor Winters attacks the consequences in terms of his doctrine of the fallacy of expressive form (*In Defense of Reason* [Denver, 1947], pp. 536-537). John Stewart, repeatedly confused by the point, argues that the poem is a statement "about," not "like," its subject (*John Crowe Ransom, op.cit.*, p. 45). And Francis X. Roellinger, Jr., with the neoscholastic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ransom is the basis of his endlessly repeated assertion, in a variety of correlated pairings (including structure and texture, design or argument or prose or logical or scientific core and residue or increment or sensibility or tissue of irrelevances), that the poem embodies both necessity and contingency.[167] The argument is broader than some sections of *The World's Body* would suggest, and bases the mimetic theory, beyond the empiricist level of copying detail, in the structural continuity of categories on the ontological level.

Potentially, this is Ransom's most important methodological insight; it could lead to a social and historical view of a unified reality within which higher level for-itself generic objectifications, such as art and science, could be located according to their division of labor as forms of social consciousness. Instead, given Ransom's metaphysics, the formalism of the theory, and the exclusion of social-historical mediation, the ontological continuity serves only to entrench the mechanical separation of universality and particularity, to exclude the category of peculiarity and the subversive catharsis dependent on it, and to ontologize the reduction of the aesthetic project to the hypostasis of the indeterminate fullness of everyday perceptual immediacy.

From this basis, Ransom views the poem as a body of language bounded by two arcs of indeterminacy (semantic and metrical), and defines "the vocation *par excellence* of criticism" as the distinction of the determinate and indeterminate elements of meaning in the work of art. In abrogating the judgment of social and artistic significance in the technical study of "the coexistence and connection" of these elements, Ransom seeks to bring criticism to a "level of professional competence."[168] The interest of this kind of study, Ransom insists, is more profound than ethical: it is ontological.

Ransom's recognition of the refrangibility of the initial subjectivity and the refractivity of the medium is a significant moment for the tradition; but the deflection from the homogenization effected by the medium to an assertion of heterogeneity as "the specific, the characteristic mode of

anti-cognitive doctrine that the end of poetry is joy in encountering a perfect object, and thus even less capable than Ransom of understanding that the joy in art is the joy of experiencing a defetishized human world, rejects the hypothesis of harmony between poetic strategy and the constitution of the world ("Two Theories of Poetry as Knowledge," *The Southern Review*, VII [Spring 1942], pp. 705, 700).

167. In 1929, he gives a clear formulation of this resemblance between the poem and the world: "Art, as a representation of nature, represents it in its dual capacity as composed in part of constants and in part of contingents. If it were lacking in either feature, it would fail in realism,...and it would forfeit our confidence" ("Flux and Blur in Contemporary Art," *op.cit.*, p. 363). And even more explicitly in 1952, Ransom argues that "the little world [the artistic imitation] sets up is a small version of our natural world in its original dignity" ("Humanism at Chicago," *The Kenyon Review*, XIV [Autumn 1952], p. 658: also in *Poems and Essays* [New York, 1955], p. 100).

168. *New Criticism, op.cit.*, pp. 300-302.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poetry"[169] distorts the discovery. The New Critical "linguistic revolution" in reading poetry is achieved by the emphasis upon "the total connotation of words;"[170] but "we cannot attend to all the meaning behind any poem, and we must have some sort of schedule of priorities in what we do attend to." The differentia of poetic discourse is the texture, the "non-structural increment of meaning," but Ransom insists that it must attach itself to the logical structure found in every poem and there for the purpose of supporting the texture.[171]

Ransom's structure-texture formulation is a rationalist deduction from his notions of the nature of reality and from the axiom of ontological resemblance. The methodological significance of this position for the present discussion lies in the unusually strong sanction it affords for the investigation of the ideological core of these aesthetic formulations, a sanction reinforced by the explanation of the genesis of the analysis. Ransom claims to have been unable for years to see how "real particularity could get into a universal," how concrete and universal could form a single unit. "But it was the political way of thinking which gave...the first analogy which seemed valid. The poem was like a democratic state, in action, and observed both macroscopically and microscopically;"[172] "a democratic state, so to speak, which realizes the ends of a state without sacrificing the personal character of its citizens."[173] The ends of the state are realized by the organic, purposive, economic human activities, and, of course, the poetic universals are paradigms of rational human processes"[174] in this sense.

We cannot fail to read in this characterization the ideological form of a historic modulation; the aesthetic function is an accretion of contingency to the primary 'organic' functions on which it depends and with which it coexists and co-constitutes the democratic—in the present analysis, corporate—state. Culture is located as an internal moment of a more comprehensive integration, and there is no question of changing either the other moment or the arrangement itself; this contingency may be a localized escape from the law of necessity, but it neither subverts nor explodes it. It is to be noted that within this framework, Ransom yet resists complete logical rationalization; indeed, he has often been criticized for going too far in the structure-texture separation.[175] But within the framework of the

169. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
170. "Poetry: I. The Formal Analysis," *The Kenyon Review*, IX (Summer 1947), p. 436.
171. *New Criticism*, pp. 128-129 and p. 226.
172. "Criticism as Pure Speculation," *op.cit.*, pp. 109-110.
173. *New Criticism*, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
174. "Artists, Soldiers, Positivists," *The Kenyon Review*, VI (Spring 1944), p. 279.
175. See, e.g., R.W. Stallman, *Critiques and Essays in Criticism 1920-1948: Representing the Achievement of Modern British and American Critics* (New York, 1949), p. 500, n. 6. See also R.S. Crane's criticism (*The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* [Toronto, 1953], p. 22).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

specific structuring of the ontic units of the theory, this mechanical pluralism is the most suitable response to the commotive pressures of the period; and although some shifts in emphasis occur during the second decade of the New Criticism, a higher level of rationalization is not in fact reached until the further formalizations on the basis of myth and analogy in Northrop Frye's extension of the realm of Ransom's category of structure.[176]

In this context, it remains to examine briefly the chief moment of internal dispute within the New Criticism; the 'heresy of paraphrase' discussion. Ransom, like all the New Critics, grants that "the poem is not included in its paraphrase." Indeed, he raises as the "Number One problem for poetic theory" the question of what is excluded from the argument, and repeatedly he locates this differentia as "the imitation-element of the poem,...its free natural imagery,"[177] and the end of poetry. But Ransom adds the second proposition that "the poem must include its own paraphrase, or else a logical argument capable of being expressed in a paraphrase," since "a pragmatic occasion is required for an act of attention." The romantic attitude of witnessing and reporting arrives at nothing: "the logic of a human purposiveness is necessary for poetic as for any other discourse."[178]

Against Ransom's dualism, Cleanth Brook's theory is an organicist contextualism. He emphasizes the lack of logical structure in the poem which exists in its metaphors; only the poem can speak the poem, no statements about the poem can be taken for its essential core, and the organic relation of all the elements means that nothing has primacy. He operates in the neo-Kantian matrix of symbolic form theories of W.M. Urban and Suzanne Langer. The poem has a unity which is the reconciliation of all disparities and tensions; everything is subordinated to "a total and governing attitude.... The unity is achieved by a dramatic process, not a logical; it represents an equilibrium of forces, not a formula."[179]

This is an irrational holistic theology which, if carried through consequentially, would block the critical project entirely. It is a contradictory unity; it both reaches backward to the Agrarian irrationality and forward to the post-logical forms of rationalization. Its most useful location for this discussion is as the ideological face of New Critical practice; the stress on the interrelation of all elements with no possible prioritization asserts an immediacy that presumes all facts equal and reproduces in literary criticism

---

176. It should be noted, as well, that the multiplicity of Ransom's rational structures operating relatively independently and linked only tangentially by the contingencies which exceed them, is itself a relativistic anticipation of structuralist positions. See "Acceptance Speech: The National Book Award for Poetry, March 10, 1964," *The Sewanee Review*, LXXII (July 1964), p. 549.

177. "Poetry: I. The Formal Analysis," *op.cit.*, p. 442.

178. "The Bases of Criticism," *The Sewanee Review*, XLII (Oct. 1944), pp. 559, 562, 563.

179. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London, 1968), pp. 168-169. See also pp. 58, 162-163, 166.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the methodology of empiricist functionalism. Brooks's assertion that all irrelevancies are functional to the total attitude in the search for unity[180] is as much (or even more) a surrender to the governing rationality as Ransom's positions. And neither theory is able to pose correctly the gains and losses involved in the critical project of translating a generic form of self-consciousness into a generic form of consciousness, that is, in raising to the level of objective knowledge the generic immediacy of the world of the art object.

Such too is the case with the related issue of irony. For Ransom, since his Fugitive discovery of irony as the third moment of inclusion that expressed humility in face of objectivity, the category has remained a category of submission to the domination of facticity which merely parries the blow of the triumph of the realm of 'is' over the realm of 'ought to be' and suspends for a moment the decision.[181] It is a flight from resolution, and, Ransom claims, a special type of poetry.[182] For Brooks, the category is a universal category of poetic order which includes and reconciles oppositions, tensions, incongruities.[183] Again, what we have to see is not so much the internal dispute in which, in any case, the definitions and intentionalities are largely shared, but that the whole dispute already takes place located on the grounds of positivity; and both poetics, in effect, are operative ideologies of functional equilibrium.

In this connection, we shall have to look at an important moment of reformulation in the second decade of New Criticism, namely, metre. On the whole, if the first decade of development had its center of gravity in the scientistic side of Ransom's New Criticism, the second saw a shift to the humanist side, the two being structurally linked in the poetics through the "prose humanism" (versus the innocent aesthetic naturalism) of moral design or logical scruples, that is, the human purposiveness of the discourse.[184] He announces that modern society does not seem destitute of its normal humanity and he has "hopes for it, even on its own terms."[185] At the same time there is a new stress that the defense of poetry "will have to be a defense of its human substance."[186] Indeed, Ransom criticizes Richard Blackmur for being too technical in his studies, for a lack of "ideological emphasis" and for appraising social and religious ideas only for their "function within the work; even though they may be ideas from which, at the very moment, out in the world of action, the issues of life and death are

180. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
181. See the "Introduction" to Ransom's edition of *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (New York, 1961), pp. xix, xxiv.
182. *New Criticism, op.cit.*, p. 95.
183. *Well Wrought Urn, op.cit.*, p. 171.
184. "The Bases of Criticism," *op.cit.*, p. 563.
185. "The Poems of T.S. Eliot: A Perspective," *New Republic*, CXXVII (Dec. 8, 1952), p. 17.
186. "Poetry: I. The Formal Analysis," *op.cit.*, p. 438.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hung."[187]

This is the kind of one-dimensional repressive value incorporation I discussed earlier; it is important for completing Ransom's trajectory, although this type of referential imperative for criticism survives only in a very deeply modified form in Frye. The call for a study of "substantive as well as formal values in the poem"[188] is accompanied by a corollary emphasis on the prose side of the poem, to the point of insisting that poetry can be read as prose at will, since "the prose is there too, and easily intelligible."[189] In the Kantian pairing of the understanding and the imagination, Ransom now finds it strategic to reinforce the former, as in his attack on symbolism: "The understanding...keeps ever awake...in order to be ready to restrain the imagination if it tries to be free."[190] In other words, the dominant rationality is ever more powerfully asserted in the aesthetic realm.

Meter is the third, and perhaps most important moment of the reformulations. In the major attempt at revision in 1947, Ransom proposed a Freudian id-ego problematic, which, we must note, was still a two-term dialectic.[191] But in 1952, meter is established as an independent third term. The enormous pressures under which Ransom's dualism operated for thirty years proved too much and that dialectic cracked. A three term dialectic is a move towards the synthesis which earlier Ransom had tried to avoid; the last important attempts at theoretical revision are the pair of "Concrete Universal" essays.[192]

In 1952, Ransom remarks that logic and metaphor have strived in vain to dominate each other; "but now I suggest that we must reckon with the meters too, and the poem assumes a trinitarian existence."[193] Meter is enforced against both and provides an overall equilibrium. And most clearly, in the same year in "Humanism at Chicago," in addition to its aspect of social, ethical, rational, and useful denotation, and its aspect of inviolable, formless free imitation beyond denotation, the poem is established as a metered construct which encompasses the first two aspects and makes an "elemental, cosmic, and eternal object."[194] The aesthetic rhythms, of course, are formal generic moments of the transhistorical human world produced in the course of the elevation of mankind out of

187. "The Shores of Criticism," *Partisan Review*, XX (Jan.-Feb. 1953), p. 109. (Reprinted in *Poems and Essays, op.cit.*, p. 104.)

188. *Ibid.*, p. 111 (or p. 108).

189. "The Strange Music of English Verse," *The Kenyon Review*, XVIII (Summer 1956), p. 465.

190. "Symbolism: American Style," *New Republic*, CXXIX (Nov. 2, 1953), p. 20.

191. "Poetry: II. The Final Cause," *The Kenyon Review*, IX (Autumn 1947), pp. 640-658.

192. "The Concrete Universal: Observations on the Understanding of Poetry," *The Kenyon Reiew* XVI (Autumn 1954), pp. 554-564 and XVII (Summer 1955), pp. 383-407. The first essay casts the poem as a triple icon in the figure of head, heart, and feet. The second essay also appears in *Poems and Essays, op.cit.*, pp. 159-185.

193. "Why Critics Don't Go Mad," *Poems and Essays, op.cit.*, p. 157.

194. *Poems and Essays, op.cit.*, pp. 99-101.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nature; the characterization of the metered object as "elemental, cosmic, and eternal" is the ideological valuation of permanent order.

V. *Conclusion*

Herbert Marcuse has repeatedly remarked on the endemic tendency to reduce the tension in the two-dimensional logic of capitalist thought to a one-dimensional and authoritarian system. The trajectory of Ransom's truncated two term dialectic progresses from a philosophical comportment that first advocated one side of the dualism, then embraced the dualism as a whole. Eventually, Ransom experimented with trinitarian formulations and unified constructions; by the time he observes that evil is "too well established in nature ever to fail us," but its party is "in the minority" and will "never prevail,"[195] the issue is decided and the dualism has the character of a shame-faced monism. At the end of his official career in 1959, Ransom no longer sides with the "Old Order" but talks "for the other side" in arguing that "not the dull sheltered Garden, but the unknown forbidding world at large, is what we must identify in all piety... as 'the best of all possible worlds'." And he cautiously turns towards the "vitality and power" of mass media.[196] The transition has been remarkable, and the personal career heroic, but these are comprehensible if we find their locus, as I have been arguing, in the historical trajectory whose significance resides in the transformation of social ideology in the cultural realm.

An important part of this totality is its moment of reified humanism. The question posed is the relation with nature which is not to be challanged but embraced. The controlling notion, embodying a nostalgia for a non-alienated human existence, while retaining the material forms and bases of alienation is that "if we can obtain the sense of community with the infinite concretion of the environing world, we may cease to feel like small aliens, even though busy, cunning and predatory ones."[197] Naturally the solution is offered in terms of the symbolic subject/object unity of the esthetic experience. It is proposed that the social function poetry fulfills is to "lend us morale; it is an excellent effect in the Age of Anxiety; and so far as we know every age is an age of anxiety."[198] The retrospective to the

195. "Acceptance Speech," *op.cit.*, p. 550.

196. "The Idea of a Literary Anthropologist and What He Might Say of the Paradise Lost of Milton," *The Kenyon Review*, XXI (Winter 1959), pp. 135, 137, 140. Cf. Ransom at the *Fugitive's Reunion*, *op.cit.*, p. 193, in 1956: "And I must confess that I think it's very healthy that we are starting all over here in this country with a kind of culture which is based on mass consumption."

197. "William Wordsworth: Notes Toward an Understanding of Poetry," *The Kenyon Review*, XII (Summer 1950), pp. 509-510.

198. "New Poets and Old Muses," in *American Poetry at Mid-Century*, by John Crowe Ransom, Delmore Schwartz and John Hall Wheelock. Lectures Presented Under the Auspices of the Gertrude Clark Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund (Washington: Reference Dept., Library of Congress, 1958), p. 11.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

past and the disaffection with the present eternalize alienation in the future as a transcendental law of life; but it is bearable because "an acute pain has become chronic and low-grade" since the Romantic tradition. Now, morale takes the place of morality actualized in practice; through the salvation of art, we have seen already, "we manage as we are."[200]

We must keep in mind the indelible positivity of this programme. "We can't have any effect on the economy, and...what results is that humanism is a way of life; and the people who practice it might as well call it a meta physical society or a mode of life;...it's a minority group and it can even be operated by people who are thoroughly attuned to the new economy, because that's the only thing that saves us."[201] Such a humanism is integrated, totally bankrupt, and cut off from the ontological possibilities for its material realization. The New Ctitics, in becoming the official, authorized defenders or representatives of a tradition of values, achieved an ideological adequation to the commotion and in consequence an influence disproportionate to their numbers. But, in becoming integrated professional specialists, they also stabilized the form and content of their vocation, and neutralized its critical possibilities. The position is very clear in Ransom's discussion of "the communities of letters." "How much more tolerant, and more humane, is this community than the formal society!" If we add them all up, we get a "secondary society." "But the group has no organization, and no revolutionary intentions." Aesthetic culture simply provides "release for the oversensitive."[202]

The complementary counterpart of New Critical reified humanism is the reified scientistic objectivism of the New Critical aesthetic. Ransom asserts that art relates to a different order of reality, a different grade of objectivity, from science. This is an ideological distortion; what is true is a division of labor between art and science as different forms of consciousness, different active ways of organizing our responses to the world on levels of mediacy specific to their respective categorical structures. But they relate to a unified reality; and in the neocapitalist commotion they are both alienated. The source of this ideological distortion involves the problematic of ontologically different relations to the world, that is, fetishized or non-fetishized. It is this alternativity of active relation which is ideologically distorted and reified, that is, taken as an inherent character of the objective world itself in the form of either a core of constancy, or the fullness of the world's body. The New Critical science replaces the real world with its own ideological-metaphysical categories which are then assumed to *be* the reality and are duly investigated with rigorous precision. In this fashion the work of art is insulated and fetishized, and the problem of the form of historical relation

199. "Alienation a Century Ago," *The Kenyon Review*, XV (Spring 1953), p. 336.
200. "Art and the Human Economy," *op.cit.*, pp. 685-686.
201. *Fugitives' Reunion, op.cit.*, p. 193.
202. "The Communities of Letters," *Poems and Essays, op.cit.*, pp. 116-117.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the world is reduced to the problem of the form of cognition of preconstituted objectivity.

This purely cognitive comportment abstracts from the process of aesthetics production and reproduction, that is, from the process of cathartic homogenization in the creation and appropriation of art via the homogeneous medium. In consequence, it posits the world as rigid subject/object duality which, if one or the other pole is not to be violated, can be linked only by a tenuous bridge of innocent contemplation. We must note the consequences of such a position: "As long as man adopts a stance of intuition and contemplation he can only relate to his own thought and to the objects of the empirical world in an immediate way. He accepts both as ready-made—produced by historical reality. As he wishes only to know the world and not to change it he is forced to accept both the empirical, material rigidity of existence and the logical rigidity of concepts as unchangeable. His mythological analyses are not concerned with the concrete origins of this rigidity nor with the real factors inherent in them that could lead to its elimination. They are concerned solely to discover how the *unchanged nature* of these data could be conjoined whilst leaving them unchanged and how to explain them *as such.*"[203]

This comportment results in the New Critical close reading which is a liquidation of the whole world outside the magic circle of the individual critic facing the individual text. Like econometry or other technologies, New Critical technicism is never innocent of the determinations of the conceptual systems which, implicitly or exlicitly, control it. The position is structurally subjectivist. The ideological specificity of New Critical close reading lies precisely in the absolutization of the methodology, and, therefore, of the subjectivism: it follows from this that the quality and nature of the results depend on and vary with the individual critic.

Although it is by now almost commonplace to observe that much of the work produced by this formalist subjectivism is arbitrary overreading or distortion of the text, the epistemological basis of this error is by no means equally clear. A theoretical conceptualization can never be symmetrical with its object; the relation between concept and object is mediated by another relation, that of the concept to its teleological basis, which itself bears a determinate relation to social location. In consequence, the conceptual realism of the close reading, like that of the contemporary structuralist reading, in aiming at the "totality of connotations," at an exhaustive positive apprehension of the object, cannot fail to be dogmatic and to project an extraneous problematic into the object and then proceed to analyze that projection.[204]

---

203. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness, op.cit.*, p. 202.

204. Cf. "The First *Telos* International Conference: 'The New Marxism'—Waterloo, Ontario, October 8-11, 1970," *Telos*, 6 (Fall 1970), p. 314.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The operation of the problematic on the formal-technical level is in one aspect a historical regression in aesthetic study. But in a number of respects, the New Critical position is an advance. Ransom's insistence that the work of art is a construct, a real, dense object, a closed structure of objectification, is a genuine advance of critical theory over all earlier biographical, 'historical', sociological, philological, or other scholarly methodologies. Until the aesthetic status of a work of art is established, there can be no aesthetic discussion, strictly speaking, and Ransom and the New Critics are important in bourgeois theory for asserting the ontological status of art as aesthetic. If they have helped to establish that art is not an inferior reality produced by or traceable to some other sphere of the social totality, and if they have helped to resist the popular nineteenth century reductions of art to some social or economic 'factor', to that extent they have made a genuine advance. Of course, at the same time art must be seen as a moment of the historical practice of the social formation, intimately involved, within the categories of that totalization of praxis, with the essentials of human development at a concrete moment in space and time; and Ransom and the New Critics failed to locate art in these terms.

In consequence, the embryonic New Critical scientific paradigm remains an alienated scientistic paradigm which deepens the reification of subjectivity. This scientism, in precluding the historico-specific consideration of symbols, points ahead to Northrop Frye; in the focus on the linguistic medium, to Marshall McLuhan. Ultimately, the New Criticism is a step forward precisely in its most profound vocational project. The positivist empiricism of New Critical practice, which accepts the object as a given facticity, is directed to the assimilation, the consumption of the art work. Professionalization in this cultural role locates the New Criticism, in terms of the commotive changes involving extensive new rationalization, as a novel productive force of the neocapitalist integration. And, in its ideological role, it prepares for even further rationalization, for even broader and deeper reification.

Towards a Marxist Theory of Value

by Agnes Heller

Originally published as a special issue of the journal *Kinesis*, this work is one of the few available in English which gives a rigorous account of the development of Marx's ethical theory. Heller, a member of the close circle of Lukács' students, has done much work in the field of problems of everyday life and values, and must be considered one of the foremost experts in this area. Price: $1.50 paperbound only.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Introduction to Adorno's "Lyric Poetry and Society"

by Bruce Mayo

Adorno's "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft" was originally broadcast as an adult education lecture over RIAS in Berlin; an expanded version, which follows in translation, appeared in the literary magazine *Akzente* in 1957 and was reprinted in the collection of essays *Noten zur Literatur I* (Suhrkamp, 1958). The restraint with which Adorno begins his argument, seeking merely to defend the right of a sociologist to say something about poetry, may seem strange to readers encountering this essay nearly twenty years later. It should be born in mind, however, that Adorno was not addressing philosophers or sociologists; we have to imagine a literary audience used to regarding poetry as a rather personal affair, and, moreover, an audience firmly in the grip of cold-war fears and attitudes. The New Critical literary conservatism of England and America created a counterpart in post-war Germany, but a comparison of the reigning American textbook for literature students, Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949) with the corresponding German text, Wolfgang Kayser's *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk* (1948) indicates that Adorno's task was perhaps even more difficult in cold-war Germany than it would have been in the English-speaking world. For Germans who had been satiated with fascist ideological criticism, the apparent methodological purity and neutrality of Kayser's work must have been a welcome relief, for unlike Warren and Wellek, who sought to differentiate specifically literary study from psychological, historical, or sociological study, Kayser simply eliminated these from the literary horizon, concerning himself with formal matters and the relation of the poem to the poet's subjectivity.

Hence, Adorno's defense of the sociologist's claim on poetry as a legitimate object of investigation, and the overthrow of New Critical attitudes which that entailed, faced a firmly entrenched opposition, one which was, if anything, more resolutely opposed to the joining of the social and poetic than its Anglo-Saxon counterpart. New Criticism did, however, originate in a complaint against the social and cultural order, both in America and in England. As John Fekete shows here in "The New Criticism" and as Robert Weimann has argued with an impressively broad survey of New Critical writings (in *"New Criticism" und die Entwicklung bürgerliche Literaturwissenschaft*, VEB Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962), this social complaint was both a critique of industrial capitalism, and on another level an apology for it. It sought to reform the understanding of poetry by resuscitating an idealized Renaissance poetic of wit and irony, and a world view shared by all classes of society. But it resolutely ignored the necessity of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

material underpinnings for such a change in the cultural superstructure. While Eliot admitted on occasion that a great poet must be deeply and personally involved with his own time as well as with history, he never explicitly recognized the material aspect of either. He praised the wonderful receptivity of the Elizabethans to new images and ideas and admired the broad range of social classes which could share that era's moral and literary conventions, but he failed to ponder how that condition arose. And even I.A. Richards, a professed materialist of the English sort, generally limits the material realm to the material organization of the individual poet or reader. The connection of poetry to the larger realm of social reality and historical forces almost inevitably requires that the literary critic abandon his insistence on 'close reading' as the beginning and end of literary analysis. He must ask what the work says about the social reality in which it was produced, and what it may say to the reader with regard to *his* social reality.

What is most surprising, then, in Adorno's argument (and most revealing of the dialectical richness of his thought) is that he overthrows New Critical dogma by accepting its major methodological premises. The purpose ofr which the article was written and the audience which it had to persuade may incline us to regard this as an astute tactical maneuver, a rhetorical device aimed at making contact with those who have fallen under the sway of a restricting literary ideology. There is more to it than this, however. An important claim of his argument is the New Critical methods—careful, sensitive reading of the words on the page, attention to irony, diction, shifts of tone and perspective implicit in the words—must lead ultimately to a full appreciation of a poem's social, historical and economic being if applied with sufficient rigor. To do this, one must accept the New Critical arguments of Wimsatt and Beardsley that a poem's content is not necessarily the content its author wanted it to have, nor can its content be judged by the effect it has upon certain readers (one must beware of the intentional and affective fallacies). The poem is an object which must be understood in its own right, apart from either its author or its readers—if this were not so, we could not admire Mörike's poetry despite that author's dull, politically uninvolved life of subjective retreat nor George's despite the fascist praise which it drew. One must recognize, too, that good poetry is not the outpouring of spontaneous feelings but consists rather in "conciliations of impulses which in most minds are still confused, intertrammelled and conflicting," in Richard's words; consists in an "objective correlative" to feeling made knowable to the intellect, as Eliot has it—thoughts which are echoed in Adorno's assertion that the subjective utterance of the poet is in fact the poet's forming of contradictory, objective historical forces impinging on him into a fixed, visible, unified whole. With Eliot and Empson one must recognize that a language is more than a mere collection of words and grammatical rules; it embodies both the habits of thought of an age and, in its deepest structure, certain constants which transcend particular

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

historical epochs and lend great poetry something of the temporal and timeless together.

But above all, one must take seriously—more seriously than did any of the New Critics in their discussions of poetry—Empson's warning in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* that verbal analysis, in the form which he himself first demonstrated, neglects the relation of a poem to its language as a whole, and neglects forms of meaning not accessible through the analysis of discreet verbal relationships. For if one discovers a pun or a shift in tone, one must ask at some point what gesture of thought it implies. And one cannot understand a collection of thoughts without seeing their motivation in underlying attitudes, which in turn must be understood in relation to the circumstances they are attitudes about. The sort of interpretation Adorno attempts begins with the apparently simple task of understanding the words and their plain sense, but ends only at the point where we discern the relation of the implied speaker to the entire world experienced in the poem. However, Adorno does not set out in this essay to demonstrate step by step all of the inferences which lead to a social interpretation of a poem. The paths from verbal pattern to underlying social contradictions are too long, too circuitous, and perhaps too inaccessible to exact analysis to trace in minute detail—which may make the interpretation unconvincing for those hard-nosed followers of Cleanth Brooks who want to see every card face up —or irrelevant for those revolutionaries who want to see the relation of thought to material praxis made simply and unmistakably clear. Adorno attempts something more modest here: he presents a line of thought which one must follow both logically and intuitively to show that social meaning must be present in the purely verbal form of aesthetically valuable verse.

Verbal form, language, and social reality are three crucial conceptions which Adorno employs to explain inferences from the poems he discusses; none of them are simple concepts, but all are related in important ways. Just as the Marxist understanding of a social situation involves much more than a surface description of social, political, and economic relationships, so do Adorno's conceptions of language and poetic form require that one think of more than words and grammar, and of more than meter, rhyme scheme, and the grouping of lines. Although Adorno does not invoke structural linguistics, his implicit claims about the nature of language are in considerable measure vindicated by the linguistic discoveries made since this essay appeared, and the linguists' arguments should be called upon, I think, to appease the remaining hard-liners among the admirers of New Critical precision. For even apparently simple sentences, the linguists can show, conceal exceedingly complex and abstract grammatical relationships to other underlying sentences, and these relationships, seemingly arbitrary at the survace level, must ultimately involve the very laws of thought itself. At the same time, grammar without semantics, i.e., form without content, has come to seem impossible because an exact grammatical description of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

language inevitably includes the language's categories of meaning—its structural reflections of the cultural, social and economic categories of the world in which it is used. A structural description of a single sentence (or of a poem) thus entails a structural knowledge of the whole language in which the poem is written and becomes, in part, a description of the language. And a description of the language inevitably becomes, in part, a description of the world, its surface and deep structures, its social contradictions and the dialectical forces—the generative laws, perhaps—present in the contradictions.

I do not mean to imply that Adorno's theory of literature is a formalist or a linguistic one, but language and linguistic form do play a crucial role. Nowhere is this clearer than in Adorno's observation that in great poetry we hear the voice of the language itself. This can only mean that the goals of history, discernable in the material contradictions of the world, are present in the deepest structural laws of language and of thought as well.

About the translation: Adorno often uses the German language in ways which cannot be imitated successfully in English; I have therefore often favored plain clarity over accuracy. Sometimes I have added words which seem to me to belong to the spirit but not to the letter of the original, and I have ventured in some places to comment on the text in footnotes, none of which are Adorno's. My heartfelt thanks to William Matheson and, especially, to Liselotte Dieckmann, who generously suggested many improvements.

RADICAL AMERICA

SUBSCRIBE TO RADICAL AMERICA FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR AND RECEIVE A REDUCED RATE. FOR A LITTLE EXTRA YOU CAN RECEIVE PERIODIC MAILINGS OF THE BEST REVOLUTIONARY PAMPHLETS BEING PRINTED IN NORTH AMERICA AND WESTERN EUROPE.

SEND YOUR CHECK FOR $__ TO RADICAL AMERICA, 5 UPLAND RD., CAMBRIDGE, MASS., 02140.

CHECK THE SUB OFFER YOU WANT:

___1 YEAR = $5 ___1 YEAR WITH PAMPHLETS = $10

___2 YEARS = $9 ___2 YEARS WITH PAMPHLETS = $18

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lyric Poetry and Society

by Theodor W. Adorno

The announcement of a lecture on lyric poetry and society will make a good many of you uncomfortable. You will expect a sociological study of the sort which can take any subject it wants under consideration—just as fifty years ago we had psychologies, thirty years ago phenomenologies of every conceivable thing. You will fear that a discussion of conditions under which works of art have come into being, and their subsequent effects, must impertinently preempt the place belonging to the experience of those works as such; that sociological orderings and relatings will suppress all insight into the truth or falsity of the objects themselves. You will suspect an intellectual of being likely to commit the error Hegel ascribed to the "formal directorate" [*formellen Vorstand*]: that while scanning the whole he will merely stand above the particular existence of which he speaks—that is, he will not see it but merely label it. Such a method becomes most distressing when applied to lyric poetry. The tenderest, most fragile forms must be touched by, even brought together with precisely that social bustle from which the ideals of our traditional conception of poetry have sought to protect them. A sphere of expression whose very essence lies in defying the power of social organization[1]—either by refusing to see it, or in overcoming it through the pathos of distance, as in Baudelaire or Nietzsche—must be arrogantly made by the sociologist into the opposite of that which it knows itself to be. Can anyone but a philistine, you will ask, talk about lyric poetry and society?

Clearly this suspicion can only be obviated when lyric works are not misused as objects for the demonstration of social theses, when, instead, their relation to social matters exposes something of their essential quality, something of the reason for their poetic worth. Such a relation must not lead us away from the works, it must lead us more deeply into them. This is really to be expected, however, as a moment's reflection will show: for the meaning of a poem is not merely the expression of individual experiences and stirrings of emotion. Rather, these become artistic only when, precisely because of their defined aesthetic form, they participate in the generality of things. Of course, what a lyric poem expresses is not necessarily what everyone experiences. Its generality is not a *volonté de tous*, not a generality which arises through an ability to communicate just those things which

1. "Die Macht der Vergesellschaftung." Adorno implies specifically the forces organizing, rationalizing, "socializing" the structure of society. "Vergesellschaften" in its sociological sense refers to the transition from the organically human communities (*Gemeinschaften*) of earlier historical periods to the rational, purpose-oriented, impersonal *Gesellschaft* characteristic of modern industrial societies.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

others are not able to express. Rather, the descent into individuality raises the lyric poem to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light things undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed—and thus the poem anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities (i.e., extreme particularities) can bind and chain that which is human. From a condition of unrestrained individuation, the lyric work strives for, awaits the realm of the general. The peculiar danger of the lyric, however, is that its own principle of individuation never guarantees the creation of compelling authenticity. It is powerless to prevent itself from remaining stuck in the accidentals of naked, isolated existence. The generality of the lyric poem's content is, nevertheless, essentially social in nature. Only he understands what the poem says who perceives in its solitude the voice of humanity; indeed, the loneliness of the lyric expression itself is latent in our individualistic and, ultimately, atomistic society—just as, by contrast, its general binding validity derives from the denseness of its individuation. For this reason the thinking through of a work of art justly requires a concrete inquiry into social content; no proper effort at understanding can satisfy itself with vague feelings of universality and inclusiveness. Such a precisely specifying cast of thought is not at odds with art and does not add merely external commentary—it is in fact required by every linguistic creation. A poem's indigenous material, its patterns and ideas, cannot be exhausted through mere static contemplation. In order to be contemplated aesthetically, they ask to be thought through, and a thought once set into motion by a poem cannot be cut off at the poem's behest.

Nevertheless, such thoughts—which amount to the social interpretation of lyric poetry, as indeed of all art works—cannot lead directly to the so-called 'social viewpoint' or to the social interests represented by the work or held by its author. Their chief task is rather to discover how the entirety of a society, as a unity containing contradictions, appears in a work; in which respects the work remains true to its society, and in which it transcends that society. Such an interpretive procedure must be—as the philosophers would have it—*immanent*. Social ideas should not be brought to works from without but should, instead, be created out of the complete organized view of things present in the works themselves. The sentence in Goethe's *Maxims and Reflections* to the effect that you do not possess what you do not understand, applies not just to our aesthetic attitude toward works of art themselves, but to aesthetic theory as well: nothing but what is in the works, and belongs to their own particular forms, provides a legitimate ground for ascertaining what the content of the works—the things which have been raised into poetry—represents in a social way. This sort of judgment requires knowledge of a work from within, to be sure, and knowledge of the society without. But knowledge has compelling authority only when it rediscovers itself in pure and utter submission to the matter at hand. We must be especially wary of the present insufferable tendency to drag out at every

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slightest opportunity the concept of ideology. For ideology is untruth—false consciousness, a lie. It manifests itself in the failure of art works, in their own intrinsic falsehood, and can be uncovered by criticism. To say, however, of great works of art, which fix real existence in determinate forms and thus lend its contradictions a purpose-carrying reconciliation[2]—to say of such works that they are ideological not only belies the truth which they contain: it falsifies the idea of ideology as well. Ideology, as a concept, must not be taken as meaning that all of art and philosophy amount to some particular persons' passing off some particular interests as general ones. The concept of ideology seeks rather to unmask false thought and at the same time to grasp its historical necessity. The greatness of works of art lies solely in their power to let those things be heard which ideology conceals. Whether intended or not, their success transcends false consciousness.

Let me return to your misgivings. You respond to lyric poetry as something set against society, something purely individual. You feel strongly that it should remain this way—that lyric expression, released from the heaviness of material things, should evoke images of a life free of the impositions of the everyday world, of usefulness, of the dumb drive for self-preservation. This demand, however, that of the untouched virgin word, is in itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold, and oppressive; and this social condition impresses itself on the poetic form in a negative way: the more heavily social conditions weigh, the more unrelentingly the poem resists, refusing to give in to any heteronomy, and constituting itself purely according to its own particular laws. Its detachment from naked existence becomes the measure of the world's falsity and meanness. Protesting against these conditions, the poem proclaims the dream of a world in which things would be different. The idiosyncrasy of poetic thought, opposing the overpowering force of material things, is a form of reaction against the reification of the world, against the rule of the wares of commerce over people which has been spreading since the beginning of the modern era—which, since the Industrial Revolution, has established itself as the ruling force in life. Even Rilke's "cult of things" belongs to this form of idio-

2. Works of art "die an Gestaltung und allein dadurch an tendenzieller Versöhnung tragender Widersprüche des realen Daseins ihr Wesen haben." This sentence, like many others, is but the tip of an iceberg. I understand it as follows: the artist is forced by the nature of art to render the fluid, evolving world of his experience in static, fixed forms; to do this, he must find common terms in the contradictions of the world which presents itself to him, so that its disparate and contradictory elements can be represented in a single, unified whole. Any discovery of unity in contradictions is necessarily the realization of their human, historical purpose or "Tendenz" (tenor, tendency), since even the simplest acts of perception, such as the recognition of a face in a jumble of lines, require that we impose or discover the human significance in what is otherwise only a confusion of data. And the 'timelessness' which we commonly recognize as a quality of great works of art is nothing other than such a discovery of the deeper purpose latent in the historical moment itself to which the work points and out of which it arises.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

syncrasy, as an attempt to bring the alien objects into subjectively pure expression and dissolve them there—to give their alienness metaphysical credit. The aesthetic weakness of this cult of things, the cryptic gesture, the mixing of religion and decorative handicraft, betrays at once the genuine power of reification that can no longer be painted over with a lyric aura, and can no longer be comprehended.

One only gives another turn to the meaning of such insight into the social nature of lyric poetry when one says that its essential character—as something immediate to us, practically second nature—is thoroughly modern. Landscape painting and its idea of "nature" has, in a similar way, developed independently only in modern times. I know that I exaggerate in saying this and that you could produce many counterexamples for me. The most compelling would be Sappho. Chinese, Japanese, Arabic poetry I leave alone, since I cannot read any of it in the original, and I suspect that translation forces it through a process of accomodation that makes adequate understanding impossible. But the ancient manifestations of what is familiar to us as the specifically lyric spirit are only isolated flashes—just as the backgrounds of older paintings sometimes suggest and anticipate the idea of landscape painting. They do not constitute its form. The great writers of early antiquity who, according to literary notions, must be counted among the lyric poets—Pindar, for one, and Alkaios, but the greater part of Walter von der Vogelweide, as well—are immensely distant from our dominant conceptions about the lyric. They lack that quality of intimacy, of non-materiality which we have justly or unjustly adopted as our criterion of lyric utterance, and only through arduous study can we overcome these conceptions.

Nevertheless, what we mean by lyric—before we stop to elaborate its meaning historically or use it to criticize the forces of individualism—has within it, in its 'purest' form, the quality of a break or rupture. The subjective being that makes itself heard in lyric poetry is one which defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective and the realm of objectivity. While its expressive gesture is directed toward, it is not intimately at one with nature. It has, so to speak, lost nature and seeks to recreate it through personification and through descent into the subjective being itself. Only after a transformation into human form can nature regain anew that which man's rule over her has taken away. Even lyrical creations which are untouched by conventional, material existence, by the crude world of material objects, owe their high worth to the power the subjective being within them has, in overcoming its alienation, to evoke an image of the natural world. Their pure subjectivity, apparently flawless, without breaks and full of harmony, actually witnesses to the opposite, to a suffering caused by existence foreign to the subject, as much as it shows the subject's love toward that existence. Indeed, the harmony of such creations is nothing other than the mutual correspondence of such suffering and such love. Even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the "Warte nur balde Ruhest du auch"[3] has yet a gesture of consolation; its unfathomable beauty cannot be separated from that which it passes over in silence: the image of a world refusing peace. Solely because the tone of the poem sympathizes with this unstated image does it insist that there is peace nevertheless. One would almost want to take the line "Ach, ich bin des Treibens müde" from the companion poem of the same title as an aid to the interpretation of this *Wanderers Nachtlied*.[4] To be sure, the first poem's greatness moves us as it does because it does not speak of alienated or disturbing things—because no restlessness of objects stands opposed to the speaking subject within the poem; rather, the anxiety is felt as an after-trembling. A second sort of substitute immediacy and wholeness is promised: the human element, language itself, appears as if it were once again the creation, while everything beyond the bounds of the poem fades away in the echo of the soul. The excluded world becomes more than appearance, however; it rises to full truth because, through the spoken expression of benign weariness, a shadow of yearning lingers over its consolation, even the shadow of death. For the "Warte nur balde" all of life is transformed, in an enigmatic, sad smile, to the short moment before falling into sleep. The tone of peace attests that peace itself could not be achieved without the dream's shattering to pieces. The shadow has no power over the image of life returning to itself; but, as a final remembrance of its disfiguration it does lend the dream the ponderous depth which resides under its weightless song. Seeing restful nature, from which the last trace of human form has been erased, the speaking subject becomes aware of its own nothingness. Unnoticeably, silently, irony lightly touches the consolation of this poem: the seconds before the sublime happiness of sleep are the same as

3. These are the last two lines of a Goethe poem so well known to German readers that it would be superfluous for Adorno to mention the title; in Longfellow's translation (which cannot convey the auditory qualities of the poem) it reads:

O'er all the hill-tops
Is quiet now,
In all the tree-tops
Hearest thou
Hardly a breath;
The birds are asleep in the trees:
Wait; soon like these
Thou too shalt rest.

4. The other "Wanderer's Night-Song," again in Longfellow's translation:

Thou that from the heavens art
Every pain and sorrow stillest
And the doubly wretched heart
Doubly with refreshment fillest,
I am weary with contending!
Why this rapture and unrest?
Peace descending
Come, ah, come into my breast!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those which separate the shortness of life from death. After Goethe, this elevated irony then fell to spitefulness, but it was always bourgeois in character: the elevation of the freed subject always had as its shadow the debasement of the subject to a thing of the marketplace, to that which only exists for others—to the personality of which we ask, "Well now, just what are you?" Within its single moment, however, the "Nachtlied" has its authenticity; the background of disintegration rescues it from triviality, and at the same time the force of disintegration has, as yet, no power over the powerless force of the poem's consolation. It is commonly said that a perfect lyric must possess totality or universality, must comprehend the whole within its bounds, reveal infinitude in its finiteness. If this is to be more than a truism of that sort of aesthetics which subsumes everything under the concept of symbolism, then it signifies that in every lyric poem the historical relation of subject to object, of individual to society within the realm of subjective spirit thrown back on its own resources—this historical relation must have been precipitated in the poem. This precipitation will be more perfect, the more the poem eschews the relation of self to society as an explicit theme and the more it allows this relation to crystallize involuntarily from within the poem.

Now that I have made this formulation, you may reproach me with having so sublimated the relationship between poetry and society—out of fear of sociological crudity—that really nothing remains of the relationship. Precisely that which is not social in a poem should become its social aspect. You might well recall to me that caricature of Gustave Doré's which presents an arch-reactionary politician whose praise of the *ancien régime* rises to the cry: "And who, my dear sirs, do we have to thank for the Revolution of 1789 if not Louis XIV!" You could apply this to my view of poetry and society: namely, society plays the role of the executed king and poetry that of those who fought against him. Poetry, you would reply, however, may no more be explained in terms of society than the Revolution may be construed to the credit of the monarchy which it overthrew—and without whose absurdities it might not have occured at that time. Whether Doré's politician was really just the stupid, cynical propagandist, as the cartoonist has ridiculed him, is beside the point—or even whether there is more truth to the politician's unintended humor than is plain to common sense (Hegel's *Philosophy of History* would have much to contribute to this politician's vindication).

All the same, there is something wrong with the comparison. Lyric poetry is not to be deduced from society; its social content is precisely its spontaneity, which does not follow from the conditions of the moment. But philosophy (again that of Hegel) knows the speculative proposition that the individual is rendered through the general and *vice versa*. This can only mean here that resistance to social pressure is not something absolutely individual. Rather, through the individual and his spontaneity, objective historical forces rouse themselves within the poem, forces which are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

propelling a restricted and restricting social condition beyond itself to a more humane one. These forces, therefore, must belong to an all-embracing configuration and in no sense merely to naked individuality, blindly opposing itself to society. Now, assuming that the lyric content has in fact—by virtue of its own subjectivity—such an objective content (and indeed, without this assumption we could hardly explain the simplest feature that makes lyric poetry possible as a genre, namely, its effect on people other than the poet himself speaking in his monologue)—then it has this objectivity only if its withdrawal into itself and away from the social surface is motivated by social forces over and beyond the head of its author. This is accomplished by means of language. The specific paradox belonging to the lyric poem—this subjective, personal element transforming itself into an objective one—is bound to that specific importance which poetry gives to linguistic *form*, an importance from which the primacy of language in all literature (prose forms as well) derives. For language itself has a double aspect. Through its configurations it submits to all possible stirrings of emotion, failing in so little that one might almost think it is language which first produces feeling. On the other hand, language remains the medium of concepts and ideas, and establishes our indispensable relation to generalities and hence to social reality. The most sublime lyric works, therefore, are those in which the subject, without a trace of his material being, intones in language until the voice of language itself is heard. The *subject's* forgetting himself, his abandoning himself to language as if devoting himself completely to an object—this and the direct intimacy and spontaneity of his *expression* are the same. Thus language begets and joins both poetry and society in their innermost natures. Lyric poetry, therefore, shows itself most thoroughly integrated into society at those points where it does not repeat what society says—where it conveys no pronouncements—but rather where the speaking subject (who succeeds in his expression) comes to full accord with the language itself, i.e., with what language seeks by its own inner tendency.

On the other hand, language cannot be raised to the position of an absolute voice of existence, as some current ontological theories of linguistics would have it. The subject, whose personal expression (in contrast to the mere signification or reporting of objective content) is necessary if that level at which the voice of historical existence may be heard is to be reached—this subject is no mere trimming on the content of language; he is not external to that content. The moment of self-forgetting in which the subject submerges in language is not a sacrifice of himself to Being. It is not a moment of compulsion or force, not even of force against the speaking subject, but rather a moment of reconciliation; language itself first speaks when it speaks not as something foreign to the subject but as his own voice. When the speaking subject, the "I," forgets himself completely, he is yet entirely present; language (as a sanctified abracadabra) would otherwise submit to the process of reification and disintegrate as it does in everyday speech.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This, however, brings us back to the actual relation between individual and society. Not only is the individual as such brought into being by society, not only are his thoughts and feelings social in nature as well: but looking at things from the other side, society exists only by virtue of its individuals, whose essence it embodies. If in the past the great philosophers professed the truth (rejected, to be sure, by our modern logical positivists) that subject and object are no rigid, isolated poles, but can only be identified within the process in which they interact, then lyric poetry is the experimental test of this philosophical proposition. In the lyric poem the subject negates both his naked, isolated opposition to society as well as his mere functioning within rationally organized society.[5]

But as organized society's ascendancy over the individual grows, the situation of lyric art becomes more precarious. The work of Baudelaire was the first to register this, in refusing to stop at the individual's suffering. Rather (an extreme consequence of European world-weariness), it went beyond the suffering of the individual and accused the entire modern epoch itself of being anti-lyrical, and by means of an heroically stylized language, it hammered out of this accusation the sparks of genuine poetry. With Baudelaire there appears for the first time a note of despair, just delicately balanced on the point of its own paradoxes. As the contradiction of poetic to communicative language grew extreme, all lyric became a precarious and desperate game; not, as narrow-minded, philistine opinion would have it, because poetry had grown incomprehensible, but because—by means of the pure self-awareness of language as a created art-language, and through its effort to attain its own absolute objectivity, without regard for communicating a narrowed, merely historical, ideologically limited objectivity—it removed itself from the objective spirit, i.e., the living language, and replaced it with an antiquated one, a poetically created surrogate. The elevated, poeticizing, subjectively brutal aspect of subsequent weaker poetry is the price that had to be paid for the attempt to keep poetry objectively alive, undisfigured, untarnished. Its false glitter is a counterpart to the demythologized world from which it extricates itself.

Certainly all this requires some qualification if it is not to be misunderstood. It was my assertion that the lyric poem is always the subjective expression of a social antagonism, as well. Since, however, the objective world which produces poetry is in itself antagonistic, the essence of lyric poetry cannot be entirely explained as the expression of a subjectivity to which language lends objectivity. The lyric subject (the more adequately it presents *itself*, the more compellingly) does not merely embody the whole. Rather it is set apart from the whole in that it owes its existence to special privilege: only the fewest individuals, given the pressures of the necessities of life, are ever allowed to grasp the general truth or shape of things in self-immersion—few, indeed, have been allowed simply to develop themselves as independent individuals, in control of the free expression of their own

5. "Vergesellschafteten Gesellschaft." See note 1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

subjectivities. The others, however, those who not only stand as strangers before the ill-at-ease poet, as if they were only objects—indeed, they have in the most literal sense been reduced to objects, i.e., victims, of the historical process—these others have the same or greater right to grope for the sounds in which suffering and dream are wed. This inalienable right has asserted itself again and again, in ways however impure, deformed, fragmentary, intermittent—in the only ways possible for those who must bear burdens.

All individual lyric poetry is indeed grounded in a collective substratum. If poetry in fact invokes the whole, and not merely that part of luxury, refinement, and tenderness belonging to those who can afford to be tender, then the substantiality even of individual poems derives to a significant degree from their participation in this substratum; in all likelihood it is this substratum that first makes of language the medium in which the subject becomes more than just a subject. The regard which Romanticism had for folksong is only the most striking example of this, certainly not the most compelling. For Romanticism followed a program of transfusing the collective into the individual—and as a result the individual poem tended to indulge more in a technical illusion of generality than to possess such a generality, one arising out of the poem itself. In place of employing such transfusions, poets who scorn every borrowing from the communal language are often able to participate in the collective substratum because of their historical experience. I name Baudelaire, whose poetry gives a slap in the face to the *juste milieu* and even to every normal, middle-class feeling of social sympathy—who, in poems such as the *Petites vieilles* or the one on the generous-hearted servant girl in the *Tableaux parisiens*, was nevertheless truer to the masses, against whom he turned his tragic-arrogant mask, truer than all the poor-people's poetry.

Because the conception of lyric poetry which I made my starting point—the conception of individual expression—appears today to be shaken to the core by the crisis of the individual, the collective substratum of poetry is thrusting upwards at the most widely various points, first simply as a ferment of individual expression itself, then perhaps also as an anticipation of a condition that transcends naked individuality in a positive way. If the translations don't deceive us, then Garcia Lorca—whom Franco's henchmen murdered, and whom no totalitarian regime could have tolerated—was the bearer of such force; and the name of Brecht suggests itself as that of a poet to whom integrity of expression was granted without his having had to pay the price of the esoteric. I hesitate to judge whether the poetic principle of individuation was in fact transformed into another higher principle here, or whether the cause lies in regression and weakening of the ego. In many cases contemporary poetry may owe its collective force to the linguistic and spiritual rudiments of a not yet completely atomized condition, one which is in every way pre-bourgeois—that of dialect poetry. Traditional lyric poetry, however, as the strictest aesthetic negation of modern middle-class values, has continued to be bound for just that reason to bourgeois society.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since reflections about general principles are insufficient, I would like, with the aid of some poems, to make more concrete the relation of the poet's subjectivity—which, of course, represents a far more general, collective subjectivity—to its antithetical social reality. The thematic elements (without which no verbal art can express itself, not even *poésie pure*) will need to be interpreted here just as much as the so-called formal elements. Attention must be given especially to the ways in which both interpenetrate, for only by means of such interpenetration does the lyric poem actually capture the historic moment. Incidentally, I would prefer not to take such poems as the one of Goethe, about which I made some remarks without offering an analysis. I shall, rather, choose later poems which do not possess the sort of unqualified authenticity one finds in the *Nachtlied*. Undoubtedly the poems I shall discuss do have something of the collective substratum in them, but I would direct your attention, above all, to ways in which various levels of society's inner contradictory relationships manifest themselves in the poet's speaking. I should repeat that neither the private person of the poet, his psychology, nor his so-called social viewpoint are to come into question here; what matters is the poem itself as a philosophical sundial of history.

First I wish to read to you "Auf einer Wanderung" ("On a Hike") by Mörike.

In ein freundliches Städtchen tret' ich ein,
In den Strassen liegt roter Abendschein,
Aus einem offnenen Fenster eben,
Ueber den reichsten Blumenflor
Hinweg, hört man Goldglockentöne schweben,
Und eine Stimme scheint ein Nachtigallenchor,
Dass die Blüten beben,
Dass die Lüfte leben,
Dass in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor.

Lang' hielt ich staunend, lustbeklommen.
Wie ich hinaus vors Tor gekommen,
Ich weiss es wahrlich selber nicht,
Ach hier, wie liegt die Welt so licht!
Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem Gewühle,
Rückwärts die Stadt in goldnem Rauch;
Wie rauscht der Erlenbach, wie rauscht
Im Grund die Mühle!
Ich bin wie trunken, irrgeführt—
O Muse, du hast mein Herz berührt
Mit einem Liebeshauch![6]

6. I enter a village through the ancient tower
Friendly streets glow in the red evening hour
In an open window, now, and over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An image promising that sort of joy which a traveller can still find on the right day in southern German villages, presents itself to the reader, but without the least compromise to the hackneyed idyll of village life, to half-timbered houses and quaint glass-roundel windows. The poem evokes a feeling of warmth and coziness in narrow corners, and at the same time it remains a work of elevated style, not disfigured by feelings of mere comfort and *Gemütlichkeit*. It does not sentimentally praise narrow simplicity at the cost of a broader view, nor the bliss of ignorance. Simple story and language help, together, to unite skillfully the heaven of things felt close at hand with that of immense expanses. The story recognizes the village only as a momentary scene, not as a place to be visited at length. The depth of feeling resulting from delight at the girl's voice heard from the window, and the greatness of all nature as well, which hears the chorus—these appear only at a point beyond the confined scene, under the open, crimson sky with its swiftly moving clouds, where golden village and roaring stream fuse into a single ideal image. This image is aided linguistically by an imponderably delicate, hardly definable, ancient and ode-like quality. As if from a great distance, the free rhythms remind us of rhymeless Greek verses, perhaps even in the sudden outbreak of pathos in the final line of the first verse, which is nevertheless evoked with the most discreet sort of word placement: "Das in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor" ("So that in heightened red the roses shine forth").[7]

Decisive is the single word "Muse" at the end. It is as if this word, one of the most abused of German classicism, shines forth for a last, final time in the light of the setting sun by being conferred on the *genius loci*, the inner

---

Full beds of flowers ever higher
Golden bell-sounds sweetly hover
And a single voice seems a nightingale choir:
That the flowers sway,
That breezes play,
And the roses' red to higher hue aspires.

Long stood I joyous, stupified
How I left the gate, found the way
Beyond the town, I cannot say;
But here—how bright the world lies!
Above, bright purple billows flow
Behind, the vaprous town in golden light
How roars the rushing stream, how roars the mill below
I reel in bliss, confused, misled—
O Muse! Throughout my heart has spread
A whisper of thy love.

7. Of course, no translation can hope to convey the qualities Adorno refers to here. The preceding two lines of the German poem, one might observe, establish momentarily a somewhat confining, though not strict, iambic diameter ("Dass" suggests a trimeter), which then expands in a "sudden outbreak of pathos" into a vaguely iambic pentameter. Stressing "Dass," one can also read this last line as a sextameter, which subtly echoes the sextameters one can hear in lines five and six.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spirit of the friendly village. As something about to disappear, it seems to have mastered all the power delight knows, a power which an invocation of the muse otherwise lacks when, helpless and odd, it is phrased in words of the modern idiom. The inspiration of the poem reveals itself in no other feature quite so perfectly as this: the choice of the most objectionable word at the critical moment, cautiously prepared by the latent Greek poetic gesture dissolves the urgent motion of the whole like a musical cadence. In the briefest of forms, the lyric succeeds in attaining what the German epic vainly sought, even in such conceptions as *Hermann and Dorothea.*[8]

The social significance of this success accords with the stage of historical experience which reveals itself in the poem. German classicism had undertaken in the name of universal humanity to eliminate the accidental elements from subjective feelings, elements which threaten feelings in a society whose interpersonal relationships are no longer direct, but mediated through the market. It strove for an 'objectivizing' of the subject, such as Hegel sought in philosophy, and attempted to overcome and reconcile the contradictions of actual living in the ideal realm of spirit. The continuing existence of these contradictions in reality nevertheless had compromised a spiritual solution: compared to the senseless, competitive life of business interests, slaving to outdo one another, without any deeper purpose (what the artist manages to call "prosaic" life); compared to a world in which the fates of individual lives are determined by blind laws, "art"—whose form implies that it speaks for a fulfilled humanity—became a mere empty word. The concept of man envisioned by classicism therefore retreated into the realm of private isolated existence and its images; only here did it seem that the 'human' could be preserved. Necessarily the idea of humanity as something whole, complete, and self-determining was renounced by the middle classes, in politics as much as in aesthetics. The stubborn limiting of oneself to things which are close at hand (which itself obeys an external compulsion) made such ideals as comfort and *Gemütlichkeit* so suspect. Meaning itself became bound to the accidents of individual fortune and happiness; it acquired, or rather usurped, the dignity that it would otherwise attain only in conjunction with the happiness of the whole.

The social force in Mörike's genius, however, consists in his having combined both experiences, that of classical elevated style and that of the romantic, private miniature—and that in doing so he perceived the boundaries of both possibilities with incomparable tact, and skillfully balanced them against each other. No expression of feeling rises beyond what can be attained at the moment. The often-cited organic quality of his work is probably nothing other than this historical-philosophical tact, possessed to such a degree by hardly any other German poet. The presumed pathological traits of Mörike, which psychologists are ready to explain for

8. An epic by Goethe depicting events in the life of a rising tavern-keeper's family, in the context of simple German village society, composed in Homeric verse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us, even the failure of the efforts of his later years, are the negative side of his extreme insight into the nature of what is possible. The poems of this hypochondriac pastor of Cleversulzbach, who is counted as one of our naive poets, are virtuoso pieces surpassed by no master of *l'art pour l'art*. The hollow and ideological qualities of the elevated style are as apparent to him as the stuffy dullness of the petite bourgeoisie—the blindness to all notions of totality characteristic of the Biedermeier period in which the greater part of his poetry appeared. He was inspired to create images which, for one last time, would betray themselves neither in their Biedermeier drapery nor in their homely table scenes, neither in their tones of virile confidence nor in their sloppy table manners. As if perched on a narrow ridge, there appears in him whatever persists of elevated style, echoing as a memory, together with the elements of an unmediated life, promising fulfillment at a time when historical developments had already condemned them. Both aspects of the vanishing era greet the poet on his hike, in their still lingering traces. He already experiences the paradox of lyric poetry in the arriving industrial age. As gently hovering and delicate as these, his first solutions, are the creations of the poets who followed him, even those who appear separated from him by a deep chasm—like Baudelaire, whose style Claudel described as a mixture of Racine and contemporary journalism. In industrial society the lyric idea of a self-regenerating directness and an immediacy of life—to the extent that it does not merely invoke an impotent romantic past—becomes more and more a condition in which the Possible stubbornly flashes its rays over lyric oetry's own impossibility.

The short poem of Stephan George, which I would now like to discuss briefly, appeared in a much later phase of this development. It is one of the famous songs from the *Seventh Ring*, a cycle of extremely compressed poems, poems which, despite their light rhythms, possess an over-heaviness of content, free of all the elements of *art nouveau*. The musical setting by the great composer Anton von Webern first brought this poem and its audacious boldness out of the horrible cultural conservatism of George's circle; with George, ideology and social content fell at widely separated extremes. The song is as follows:

Im windes-weben
War meine frage
Nur träumerei
Nur lächeln war
Was du gegeben
Aus nasser nacht

Ein glanz entfacht—
Nun drängt der mai
Nun muss ich gar
Um dein aug und haar
Alle tage
In sehnen leben.[9]

9. In weaving winds
My asking seemed
Merely dreamed
That you gave
Was merely smiled
In glistening night

A glimmer kindled—
Now presses May
Now must I e'er
For your eye and hair
Endless days
In longing live.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is no doubt whatsoever of the poem's elevated style. The joy of things felt close at hand, which Mörike's much older poem still touches briefly, is forbidden here. It is banned by just that Nietzschean sense of "suffering distance" which George knew he was destined to carry on. Between Mörike and him lie only the repellent remains of the Romantics—the idyllic fragments have turned to decayed heart-warmers, hopelessly aged. While George's poetry—that of the splendidly individual—presupposes as a condition of its very possibility an individualistic, bourgeois society, and the individual who exists for himself alone, it nevertheless bans the commonly accepted forms, no less than the themes, of bourgeois poetry. Because this poetry, however, can speak from no other standpoint or configuration than precisely those bourgeois frames of mind which it rejects —not a priori, silently, but with express intention—because of this it is blocked, dammed at the source: and so it feigns a feudal condition. This hides itself, socially, behind what is tritely called George's aristocratic stance. It is not the pose which angers the good burgher who cannot fondle these poems in his own accustomed way. Rather, however anti-social this pose appears, it is brought to fruition by the same social dialectic which denies the lyric writer his identification with the existing order of things and its repertoire of forms, while he remains sworn to this order in its every detail: he can speak from no other standpoint than that of a past society, stably ruling itself from within. From this society is taken the ideal of nobility which dictates the choice of every word, image, and sound in the poem; and its form—in some hardly specifiable manner conveyed, as it were, into the linguistic configuration—is medieval. In this sense the poem, like all of George, is in fact neo-romantic. It is not, however, real objects, not sounds which are called up, but a buried condition of the soul. The latent force of the ideal, artistically compelled into being, the absence of all crude archaisms, raises the song above the despondent story (which it, nonetheless, offers): it can hardly be mistaken for the cheap decorative imitations of *Minnesang* and medieval legend, nor for a Sunday-supplement poem of the modern world; its stylization saves it from conformism. There is as little space for the organic reconciliation of conflicts in the poem as George's era granted for the smoothing over of real ones; they are brought under control only by selection, by elimination of the unmanageable.

Wherever 'near' things, i.e., things belonging to concrete, immediate experience, are still admitted in George's lyric poetry, they are allowed only at the price of being mythologized. Nothing is allowed to remain as it is. Thus, in one of the landscapes of the *Seventh Ring*, the child who picks berries is transformed into a fairy-tale child, wordlessly, as if with a magic wand, in an act of magic violence. The harmony of the song is wrung from an extreme of dissonance; it rests on what Valéry called *refus*, a stern self-denial of every means by which the convention of lyric poetry pretends to capture the aura of objects. The method retains only the models, the mere

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formal ideas and schemata of the lyric itself—in discarding every chance element, these forms speak once again, tense with expression. In the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm the elevated poetic style is allowed to appeal to no tradition, least of all the classical. Elevated style is attained not by pretending to rhetorical figures and rhythms, but by ascetically omitting whatever would lessen the distance from the tainted language of commerce. In order that the subject may truly resist the lonely process of reification he may not even attempt anymore to retreat to himself—to his private property. He is frightened by the traces of an individualism which has meanwhile sold itself to the literary supplements of the marketplace. The poet must, rather, by denying himself, step out of himself. He must, so to speak, make of himself a vessel for the ideal of a pure language. The great poems of George are dedicated to the preservation of such language. Educated in the romance languages, but especially in that reduction of lyric poetry to its simplest elements which Verlaine used to create an instrument for the most finely differentiated expression, the ear of George, of this follower of Mallarmé, hears its own language as if it were a foreign tongue. He overcomes his alienation from German by raising it to the alienation of a language which is not spoken any more but imagined, and in whose potential he dimly perceives what might be composed. But his applications of this insight did not quite work out. The four lines, "Nun muss ich gar Um dein aug und haar Alle tage In sehnen leben" ("Now must I [gar] For your eye and hair Every day In longing live"), which I count among the most irresistable in German poetry, are like a quotation, but not from another poet. They seem to be, rather, from some corpus neglected by the language, irretrievably lost. The *Minnesänger* could have created such lines if they, if a tradition—one would almost say, if the German language itself had succeeded. It was in such a spirit that Borchardt wanted to translate Dante.

The word "gar" has grated on subtle ears; it is probably used in place of "ganz und gar" ["utterly" or "completely," a relatively fixed expression] and, to some extent, on account of the rhyme. One may easily concede that, in the way the word has been shoved into the verse, it has no proper meaning at all. But great works of art are those which succeed precisely in the most doubtful places: as, for example, the most sublime musical works are not entirely subsumed by their formal schemes, but radiate beyond them with a few superfluous notes or measures. So it is with this "gar," a "sediment of the absurd" in Goethe's words, with which language flees the subjective intention which called up the word. Probably it is this word in fact which establishes the rank of the poem, acting with the force of the *déjà vu*: through it its linguistic melody reaches out beyond mere signifying. In the age of the decline of language, George grasps in it the idea which the course of history denied language, and constructs lines which sound as if they did not come from him but had been present from the very dawn of ages and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would always be as they are. Their Quixotic qualities, however, the impossibility of such poetic restoration-work, the dangers of mere handicraft, contribute to the content of the poem; the chimerical longing of language for the impossible is made into an expression of the speaker's insatiable erotic longing; he frees himself from himself, relieves himself, in another.

A transformation of such tremendously exaggerated individuality to self-annihilation (and what is the Maximin-cult of the late George[10] if not a renunciation of individuality desperately trying to interpret itself in a positive way) was needed to prepare that phantasmagoria for which the German language had vainly groped in its greatest masters—in folk song. Only by means of a differentiation—which expanded to such a degree that it could no longer endure its own fragmentation, its extreme spread of differences; could endure nothing which failed to show the whole free from the disgrace of individuation, in its particularities—only by means of this extreme differentiation could the lyric Word do the bidding of language's deepest being and oppose its enforced service in the realm of economically organized purposes and goals.[11] And with that the thought of a free humanity is served, even if George's school masked this thought behind a base cult of elevation.[12] George has his truth in his poetry's breaking through the walls of individuality, in its perfection of the particular, in its sensitivity arrayed against the banal as much as, in the end, against the exquisitely choice. If its expression concentrated itself in the individual, completely saturating him with substance and experience garnered from its own loneliness, then precisely this speech becomes the voice of men between whom the barriers have fallen.

10. George met the 15-year-old Maximilian Kronberger in Munich in 1902; when the handsome and talented boy died in 1904 George wrote *Maximilian, ein Gedenkbuch* to celebrate his memory. In George's later poetry the youth is raised to a prophet of a rebirth of the Greek spirit.

11. "Economically organized" is, of course, a potentially misleading addition. I mean simply to remind the reader here that the purposes and goals against which the poet's language speaks are not *merely* those which have become fixed in structures of the language he uses, but are indirectly the limited, utilitarian purposes of the social and economic organization in which the language is embedded. The next sentence asserts this relationship on the deeper level of the poem's 'timelessness': the true, unerring voice of Language-in-Itself ("das An-sich-Sein der Sprache") is a product—and producer—of the final, unchanging goals, i.e., the *telos* of human history (or history humanely understood).

12. George, like Rilke, lived an austere and 'pure' life, and the followers he gathered around him insisted on the corresponding other-worldly purity of the poetic tradition he tried, unsuccessfully, to found.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Frankfurt School's Critique of Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge

by Martin Jay

In its initial contract with the Education Ministry of the city of Frankfurt signed in 1923, the Institut für Sozialforschung agreed to provide office space for two university professors on the first floor of its soon-to-be-completed building on the Victoria-Allee. During the early thirties, in the period that began with Max Horkheimer's accession to the directorship and ended with the Institut's forced departure from Germany, the tenants were two scholars of considerable distinction. The first was the political economist Adolph Löwe, recently of the Institute for World Economics in Kiel. Löwe had been a boyhood friend of Horkheimer and his co-director Friedrich Pollock and continued his close association with them during his years in Frankfurt. Together with Paul Tillich, Kurt Riezler, and Karl Mennicke, they met periodically in a small discussion group known as the *Kränzchen*, which retained its coherence for some time after its members regrouped in exile in New York. Although Löwe was a luminary of the New School for Social Research, a center of opposition to the Institut für Sozialforschung during its days at Columbia, he remained close friends with Horkheimer and his circle.

The second tenant in the Institut's building was the sociologist of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, who had just moved from the University of Heidelberg to Frankfurt. Although he too was an occasional member of the *Kränzchen*, it appears from the testimony of his former pupil Kurt H. Wolff and others that Mannheim's relations with the Institut, unlike Löwe's, were never more than correct.[1] Although all the sources of his distance from the Institut cannot be known, it is likely that substantive disagreements were the most responsible. In fact, the first article that Horkheimer ever published was a slashing attack on Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, which appeared in the *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* in 1930.[2] That Horkheimer chose Mannheim as the first object of his critical scrutiny is itself significant. More significant still is that in years hence other members of what became known as the Frankfurt School returned again and again to Mannheim and the sociology of knowledge.[3]

---

* This essay has benefitted from the comments of David Kettler, Volker Meja, Paul Piccone, Wolfgang Sauer, and my wife, Cathy Gallagher.

1. Conversation with Kurt H. Wolff, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May, 1971.

2. Max Horkheimer, "Ein neuer Ideologiebegriff?," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und die Arbeiterbewegung*, XV (1930).

3. Among the other articles were Herbert Marcuse, "Zur Wahrheitsproblematik der soziologischer Methode," *Die Gesellschaft*, VI 2 (1929); Karl August Wittfogel, "Wissen und Gesellschaft. Neuere deutsche Literatur zur Wissenssoziologie," *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, V, 1 (1931); Theodor W. Adorno, "The Sociology of Knowledge and its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max Scheler, the other chief exponent of that nascent discipline during Weimar, was also a frequent target of their attack.[4] Clearly, the sociology of knowledge and the related issues of ideology and true and false consciousness were deemed of great importance by Horkheimer and his colleagues. For with the collapse of both positivism and its historicist alternative, bourgeois and Marxist thinkers alike were faced with the need to establish the ground of their value systems to fend off relativism. The neo-Kantian revival of the pre-war years had clearly failed in this task. Bourgeois neo-Kantians like Max Weber withdrew into a stoical resignation when confronted with the irrationality of value choices. Marxist neo-Kantians like Bernstein and Adler could offer little more to overcome the antinomy of facts and values. After the war, which generalized the crisis of meaning well beyond the intellectuals whose preserve it had been before 1914, several new bourgeois alternatives emerged. Existentialism, whose most political exponent was the jurist Carl Schmitt, argued for a decisionism in which men posited their values through irrational action. Another position, equally sinister in its implications, was the *völkish* or social conservative claim that values were "rooted" in a people or race, an answer that historians traditionally include in the pathology of proto-Nazism. Within religious circles, the so-called neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth turned to unreasoning faith as an antidote to Ernst Troeltsch's failure to ground Christian values in the flux of history. But none of these satisfactorily dealt with the crisis in bourgeois values, a crisis whose origins could not be found in the sphere of culture alone.

A recognition that society rather than culture was the source of the confusion led other intellectuals, either in the Marxist movement or on its fringes, to consider the sociology of knowledge as a possible answer. Broadly speaking, this was the tack taken by the neo-Hegelian Marxists, Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and the Frankfurt School. It was also taken, however, by the non-Marxist Karl Mannheim, whose challenge to the Marxist position was all the more important because of a shared stress on the connection between culture and society. In fact, Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* has been called by some the bourgeois response to Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* at least by those who challenge that attribution to Heidegger's

---

Consequences," *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London, 1967), first appeared as "Ueber Mannheims Wissensoziologie," *Aufklärung*, II (April 25, 1953); Max Horkheimer, "Ideologie und Handeln," in *Soziologische Forschung in unseren Zeit. Leopold von Wiese zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Karl Gustav Specht (Cologne and Opladen, 1951); and "Ideology" in *Aspects of Sociology*, by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, trans. John Viertel (Boston, 1972).

4. See, for example, Max Horkheimer, "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, IV, 1 (1935). A post-war member of the Institute, Kurt Lenk, has continued the attack. See his *Von der Ohnmacht des Geistes: Darstellung der Spätphilosophie Max Schelers* (Tübingen, 1959) and "Geist und Geschichte. Ein Beitrag zum Geschichtsdenken Max Schelers," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, VIII (1956). I am indebted to Volker Meja for bringing Lenk's work to my attention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Being and Time.[5] Consequently before one can understand the Frankfurt School's critique of Mannheim, his relationship to Lukács must be clarified, a task made much easier by the research of David Kettler.[6]

From 1916 through 1919, Mannheim and Lukács were members of a circle in their native Budapest known as "The Sprites" (*Szellemkek*), a name derived from the German word *Geist*. Among their associates were Bela Fogarasi, Arnold Hauser, Bela Bélász, and Bela Bartok. Mannheim's essay of 1919, entitled "Soul and Culture," was the leading manifesto of the group, which advocated what Kettler has called "revolutionary culturalism." Although to the left politically, the Sprites were strongly opposed to the mechanical materialism they associated with the Orthodox Marxism of the Second International. Instead, they supported a moral-cultural revolution that derived in part from Ervin Szabo, the leading Hungarian disciple of Georges Sorel. Lukács' sudden conversion to Marxism in December, 1918, during the revolutionary turmoil following the first world war, thus came as an enormous shock to his colleagues. Although a number of the Sprites were to follow his lead and join the newly created Communist Party, Mannheim did not. He was apparently unaffected by Lukács' political metamorphosis. But on a crucial intellectual level, if Kettler is right, Lukács' transformation did have a profound effect on Mannheim's subsequent thinking, especially after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*.

The change was most important, at least for our purposes, in his work on the relation between culture and society. In his first study of that relation, "On the Peculiarity of Cultural-sociological Knowledge,"[7] written in 1921 but left unpublished, Mannheim had explicitly rejected the genetic fallacy he saw lurking behind attempts to relate the validity of values to other social origins. He took pains instead to maintain the neutrality of a sociological analysis in judging values. But in a second essay on the same theme written three years later, after Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, an essay entitled "A Sociological Theory of Culture and its Knowability,"[8] Mannheim's position had altered drastically. Now the barrier between social function and intrinsic value was broken, at least for a certain type of

5. George Lichtheim in *The Concept of Ideology* (New York, 1967), p. 40, calls it the "positivist's rejoinder to *History and Class Consciousness*." Mannheim's response to Lukács was primarily over his treatment of ideology. The section of his book on utopia might be seen as an answer to Ernst Bloch's *Geist der Utopie*, which appeared in 1918, although Mannheim never mentions this work in his book. I owe this suggestion to a conversation with Hans Mayer in Milwaukee in November, 1973.

6. David Kettler, "Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Philosophy: the Place of Traditional Problems in the Formation of Mannheim's Thought," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXII (1967); "Culture and Revolution: Lukács in the Hungarian Revolution of 1918," *Telos*, 10 (Winter, 1971).

7. Mannheim, "Uber die Eigenart kultursoziologische Erkenntnis," discussed in Kettler, "Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Philosophy."

8. Mannheim, "Eine soziologische Theorie der Kultur und ihrer Erkennbarkeit," discussed in Kettler, "Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Philosophy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knowledge he called "conjunctive." By this term, Mannheim meant the moral-cultural-practical knowledge that was the special preserve of the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*. A more recent student of the sociology of knowledge, Werner Stark, has chosen the term axiological to denote the same area of human concern.[9] Its antithesis, to remain with Mannheim's vocabulary, is "cummunicative" knowledge, by which he meant the natural sciences with their goal of mastering nature.

This distinction, of course, was a familiar one in Central Europe during the first decades of this century. Lukács, however, has been the first to employ it in a Marxist framework in his polemic against Engels'· and Kautsky's scientistic rendering of dialectical materialism. What Lukács had done by this integration was to *socialize* the vantage point from which true moral-cultural-practical knowledge, Mannheim's "conjunctive" knowledge, was possible. The pre-war theoreticians of the *Geisteswissenschaften* had assumed that this type of knowledge could be obtained independently of the social position of the knower. But for Lukács, only the proletariat could possess the *total* vantage point such knowledge required, because only the proletariat was both the subject and object of history, a role guaranteed by its pivotal position in the labor process. Behind this epistemological argument, as Lukács acknowledged, was the assumption Giambattista Vico had articulated in the eighteenth century: man can understand the historical world better than the natural world, because only what one makes can one fully comprehend.

In his essay of 1924, Mannheim accepted this critical link between social function and the validity of "conjunctive" knowledge. He also endorsed Lukács' stress on the socio-cultural totality, itself a frequently emphasized concept in the 1920's at a time when cultural fragmentation seemed particularly threatening. He went beyond Lukács, however, in also accepting Troeltsch's irrationalist *Gestaltist* notion of totality, which he saw as applicable in certain areas of history where rationalism was not significant, e.g. art history.[10] Finally, he embraced Lukács' argument, which was doubtless current among the Sprites before Lukács' conversion to Marxism, that the rise of bourgeois society meant an unfortunate domination of "communicative" over "conjunctive" knowledge. But where he stopped short of Lukács was in refusing to identify the proletariat with the new bearers of a totalistic moral-cultural-practical orientation. Instead, he turned to the intellectual, whose insight into the totality was understood to be a product of the *Bildung* (self-cultivation) presumably attending the work of cultural sociology, a position also close to Troeltsch's. This was, however, only a way-station to his more celebrated treatment of the

9. Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Knowledge* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958).

10. For Mannheim's indebtedness to Troeltsch, see his essay on "Historicism," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York, 1952).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intellectuals as a collectivity in *Ideology and Utopia*. Here the integration of individual perspectives was the new means through which totalistic knowledge was possible. The partial validity of these perspectives was rooted in each intellectual's social situation, but as a collective they were the least beholden of any social group to a partial vantage point. What Mannheim was later to call "relationism" meant that the relativism suggested by his concept of "total Ideology," a relativism implicit in the breakdown of German historicism's essentially religious faith in the inherent meaningfulness of the world,[11] could be overcome through a dynamic synthesis of partial truths. The totality Lukács had sought in the special universal nature of the proletariat, Mannheim claimed to find in the harmonious integration of all the viewpoints represented by the collectivity of "free-floating intellectuals." What made such an integrated viewpoint "true" was its appropriateness as a reflection of the social reality of the period under question. Traditional notions of truth as immutable for all time he rejected as outmoded; truth was historical, but this was not a problem for those who denied the eternal component in the definition of truth.

In his search for a total truth that would be grounded in the social situation of the here and now, Mannheim was clearly accepting Lukács' problematic, if somewhat modified by his continuing adherence to Troeltsch's alternative use of totality as an irrationalist *Gestalt*. But the essay in which Lukács' influence was specifically acknowledged remained unpublished. By 1929 and *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim was content to refer to what he called Lukács' "profoundly important work" only in passing, although he did footnote him in his chapter on "The Prospects of Scientific Politics." In the 1931 essay "Wissenssoziologie," appended to later versions of the book, an essay written when Mannheim, according to Kettler, was making every "effort to appear more Weberian than the Weberians,"[12] the tone of his remarks turned more hostile. He singled Lukács out for failing "to distinguish between the problem of unmaking ideologies on the one hand and the sociology of knowledge on the other,"[13] by which he meant the failure to see Marxism as merely one ideology among others and not the standard of truth by which other theories could be measured and found wanting as false consciousness. Because of his unmasking of Marxism in this way, Mannheim has been called a relativist in opposition to Lukács, despite his desperate efforts to salvage truth through relationism. Mannheim has been seen by such commentators as Fritz Ringer

---

11. For a history of historicism, see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History* (Middletown, Conn., 1968).

12. Kettler has also argued that Mannheim adjusted his remarks to his audience in a way that might well have earned the Frankfurt School's distrust (letter from Kettler to me, January 17, 1974).

13. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York, 1936), p. 310.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Maurice Mandelbaum as one of the last to grapple with the relativistic implications of historicism and ultimately, like so many others, to have failed.[14]

There is, however, another perspective from which Mannheim's work can be seen. Here the importance of *History and Class Consciousness* is crucial, for although Mannheim repudiated the role assigned by Lukács to the proletariat, he was considerably more faithful in other ways. The first of these was his acceptance, which we have already noted, of the necessary relationship between social situation and the truth value of the cultural products created in any specific context. Here a link between theory and some version of practice was suggested, although without the connection between practice and the labor process which Marxism demanded. In fact a number of later observers were to stress the element of commitment and action in Mannheim's analysis of the means by which valid "conjunctive" knowledge was to be obtained.[15] His "free-floating intellectuals" were not to be understood as floating amidst the parapets of an ivory tower. On the contrary, their participation in the world they hoped to understand was a precondition for a real contribution to that understanding.

Mannheim was essentially faithful to Lukács in another way as well: in his adherence to the concept of totality, to which he had been committed as early as 1922 and his study of the "Structural Analysis of Epistemology."[16] In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim was to write: "The study of intellectual history can and must be pursued in a manner which will see in the sequence and co-existence of phenomena more than mere accidental relationships, and will seek to discover in the totality of the historical complex, the role, significance, and meaning of each component element. It is with this type of sociological approach to history that we identify ourselves."[17] Although Mannheim was careful to disengage himself from what he called the "ontological-metaphysical" reading of the idea of totality in Lukács and seems to have identified more closely with the hypothetical usage of the concept in the work of Ernst Troeltsch,[18] it is clear that a synthetic, holistic impulse was at the root of his attempt to overcome the cultural crisis of his

14. Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 425 f.; Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge; An Answer to Relativism* (New York, 1938), pp. 67 f.

15. See, for example, Paul Kecskemeti, *Introduction to Mannheim, Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1952), p. 7; and H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), p. 424. Felix Gilbert has gone as far as linking Mannheim to Carl Schmitt as common advocates of decisionism. See his article "Political Power and Academic Responsibility: Reflections on Friedrich Meinecke's *Drei Generationen deutscher Gelehrtenpolitik*," in *The Responsibility of Power*, ed. Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern (Garden City, New York, 1969), p. 437.

16. Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York, 1953).

17. *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 93.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time. His belief that the solution might well be at hand was expressed in his 1924 essay on "Historicism," where he wrote: "the present trend toward synthesis, toward the investigation of totalities may be regarded as the emergence, at the level of reflection, of a force which is pushing social reality into more collectivist channels."[19] What the force was Mannheim did not specify. Clearly, there was an element of wishful thinking here, as there was in Lukács' identification of the proletariat as the universal class, both subject and object of history. His yearning for synthesis was of such intensity that Karl Popper, for all his other faults, was probably correct in singling out Mannheim as a leading advocate of holism in *The Poverty of Historicism*.[20] In Werner Stark's use of the term, both Lukács and Mannheim were "functionalist" sociologists of knowledge; that is, they assumed that culture and society form a totality with analogous interrelationships among its various constituent elements. Both rejected the "causalist" alternative that posited a centrally determining factor, such as the economic sub-structure of Orthodox Marxism.

With the relationship between Mannheim and Lukács presumably a bit clearer, we can now turn to the Frankfurt School's critique of Mannheim and the larger issue of the concept of ideology. When Lukács finally confronted Mannheim's arguments in an article in *Aufbau* in 1946, eight years before his diatribe against him in *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, he based his arguments on relatively orthodox Marxist grounds.[21] As a result, the task of defending and refining the arguments of *History and Class Consciousness* from within the Marxist tradition was left to others outside the orbit of the Communist Party, where such issues as totality, *praxis*, reification, and the distinction between history and nature were rarely treated with sophistication, if discussed at all. Among the first to respond to Mannheim's challenge to Marxism were the members of the still inchoate Frankfurt School.

In addition to Horkheimer's article in the *Grünberg Archiv*, to which we will return shortly, *Ideology and Utopia* was subject to almost immediate scrutiny by Herbert Marcuse in an article in Rudolf Hilferding's *Die Gesellschaft* in 1929.[22] At that time, Marcuse was not yet a member of the Institut für Sozialforschung, which he joined only shortly before its departure from Germany. In fact, he was still very much a student of Martin Heidegger, whose philosophy he attempted to reconcile with Marxism in a number of essays written before his entrance into the Institut's

19. Mannheim, "Historicism," p. 96.
20. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London 1957), *passim*.
21. Lukács, "Die deutsche Soziologie zwischen dem ersten und dem zweiten Weltkrieg," *Aufbau*, II (1946) and *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* in *Werke*, Vol. IX (Neuwied, 1961); for a defense of Mannheim, see M.A. Hodges, "Lukács on Irrationalism," in *Georg Lukács, The Man, his Work and his Ideas*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson (New York, 1970), pp. 104 f.
22. See footnote 3.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

circle in 1932.[23] But despite what can be seen as its impure status as a Frankfurt School response to Mannheim, Marcuse's article should be examined for its anticipation of later points made by his future colleagues, as well as for its positing of other arguments that they, and the later Marcuse himself, would reject.

What immediately strikes the reader of the piece is Marcuse's surprisingly favorable attitude towards *Ideology and Utopia*. The central problem of the contemporary period, he argued, was discussed in Mannheim's book, that problem being the universal historicity of human existence and the correspondingly questionable nature of the traditional separation of real and ideal being. Mannheim, Marcuse noted with approval, recognized the inevitably temporal dimension of all cultural phenomena, as well as their situational relatedness. In fact, even when applied to Marxism itself, which Mannheim reduced to the particular ideology of the working class, these arguments served a useful function in Marcuse's eyes. For what Mannheim did was to free Marxism from the transcendental, ahistorical status accorded it by the Revisionists and Neo-Kantians such as Max Adler and thereby reveal it as the concrete theory of proletarian *praxis*. In so doing, he restored the relationship between theory and practice which the Revisionists and Orthodox theoreticians of the Second Internation alike had denied. Still another virtue of Mannheim's analysis, as Marcuse interpreted it, was his undermining of the assumption that truth is timeless. Like Marx, he recognized that the historical conditioning of a theory does not necessarily call its validity into question. As a result, the old antithesis of relativism and absolutism could no longer be grounded in the notion that truth and immutability were synonymous.

Having thus praised Mannheim, however, Marcuse was quick to point to a number of inadequacies in his version of the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim was perhaps at his worst on the question of true and false consciousness, a distinction that Marcuse as a Marxist was anxious to retain. To call consciousness "true" when it corresponded to the given social reality of the group which spawned it and "false" when it was incompatible with that reality failed for several reasons. First was the problem of the means by which an appropriate correspondence of thought to social being might be ascertained. Nowhere did Mannheim really provide a mechanism by which such a decision might be made. Second was the inadequacy of Mannheim's treatment of the "social being" to which ideologies were to correspond. To Marcuse, Mannheim's understanding of society was undialectical, lacking an appreciation of what he called the "intentional" character of social being.

---

23. The most important of these was "Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie des historischen Materialismus," *Philosophische Hefte I*, 1 (1928); for a critique of his efforts, see Alfred Schmidt, "Existential-Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse," *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt, 1968).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That is, Mannheim reified society as a given and missed the constitutive role consciousness itself played in the creation of social reality. To posit a fixed social being which unreciprocally conditions thought was to fall back to a pre-Lukácsian, indeed pre-Marxist materialism. Third, Mannheim's hope for a dynamic synthesis of partial viewpoints into a total truth valid for a specific period in history could not be realized because the concrete preconditions for such a reconciliation were left unexplored in Mannheim's theory of the free-floating intelligentsia. The necessity of mediations between or among different, even contradictory viewpoints was lost in Mannheim's harmonistic belief in the possibility of a grand synthesis of partial views. What was to happen, Marcuse implied, if Mannheim's relationist symphony played out of tune? Fourth, Marcuse argued that Mannheim's attempt to judge a theory's worth by its relation to a specific social situation was only partially successful, for there is—and here Marcuse the Heideggerian was speaking—a transcendent dimension to truth. Historical facticity was part of a deeper structural reality which had to serve as the final court of appeal for the validity of a theory, and then only in the long run.

This last argument, the appeal to long-run historical processes as the court of last resort, was later to become a major element in the Frankfurt School's critique of pragmatism.[24] That Mannheim himself was something more than a pragmatist can be grasped from his expression of concern over the decline of utopian thought in *Ideology and Utopia*,[25] a fear the Frankfurt School itself was frequently to voice. But Marcuse, like Horkheimer after him, paid little attention to this common sentiment and focused instead on Mannheim's failure to integrate the utopian into his epistemology, which he saw as essentially pragmatist in inclination.

Marcuse finished his review on a positive note, the last time such a note would be sounded by a Frankfurt School member in discussing Mannheim. According to Marcuse, Mannheim's historicization of knowledge, with its reopening of the question of theory and practice, had helped recapture the "ground of genuine decision without which existence in the world (*Dasein*) cannot exist in the long run."[26] This conclusion is striking not only because it links Marcuse to the existential decisionism which he was to criticize in the work of Carl Schmitt only a few years later,[27] but also because it was directly opposed to Horkheimer's appraisal of Mannheim in "A New Concept of Ideology?" published in the following year.

To Horkheimer, there was no real connection between theory and

24. See for example, Max Horkheimer, "Zum Problem der Wahrheit," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, IV, 3 (1935).

25. *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 248-263.

26. Marcuse, "Zur Wahrheitsproblematik...," p. 369.

27. Marcuse, "The Struggle against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State," *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1968), pp. 31 f.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

practice in Mannheim's thinking. Whereas Marx had wanted the transformation of society, Mannheim was only interested in the salvation of a totalistic view of cognition. In the language of an article Horkheimer was not to write until seven years later, the sociology of knowledge was thus a "traditional" rather than "critical" theory.[28] Mannheim was still in the historicist tradition of *Geistesgeschichte* with its unwarranted belief in the meaningfulness of the world. The very goal of total knowledge, Horkheimer argued, betrayed an underlying acceptance of the classical German Idealist notion of a transcendent subject capable of a harmonious, all-embracing view of the whole. Such a hypostatized subject did not, indeed could not, exist in a contradictory world. As long as men did not rationally plan their history, social contradictions could not end. Thus, even though Mannheim had a relativistic moment in his belief in "total ideology," a metaphysical, absolutist residue remained in his quest for the means to overcome partiality. Indeed, to speak of *partial* ideologies was only possible if the absolutist notion of total truth was lurking in the shadows. In fact, Horkheimer argued, Mannheim's desire for totality suggested the undialectical holism of the *Gestalt* psychologists and harkened back to Hegel's hypostatized *Volksgeist* with its attendant suppression of concrete subjectivity. Mannheim also fell back behind Marx to Hegel in minimizing the social contradictions which refused to be harmoniously reconciled at the present time.

In so arguing, Horkheimer expressed that abhorrence of identity theory which was to surface in more obvious ways during the later years of the Frankfurt School, especially after the entrance of Theodor W. Adorno into Institut affairs on a full-time basis in 1938. In attacking Mannheim's holism, Horkheimer was also criticizing Lukács' version of the same theme, at least implicitly. This article was the first example of the Frankfurt School's growing distance from Marxist Humanism as it has traditionally been understood, a distance I have attempted to trace elsewhere.[29] Neither the proletariat in its imputed role as the subject and object of history, nor the free-floating intelligentsia with their symphony of partial viewpoints could really attain a total view of truth, for truth did not reside in the totality, at least not yet.

On most other points, Horkheimer and Marcuse were very much at one in their criticism of Mannheim. Like his future colleague, Horkheimer dismissed the notion of judging truth or falsehood by the timeliness of the theory in relation to the social reality it purported to reflect. Like Marcuse, he attacked the notion of "social relatedness" as undialectical without a critique of social existence itself. Lacking this analysis, Mannheim had

28. Horkheimer, "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VI, 2 (1937).

29. Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism," *Social Research*, XXXIX, 2 (Summer, 1972).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regressed back to Hegel's metaphysical notion of Being in his *Logic*. Even Mannheim's celebrated study of "Conservative Thought," so Horkheimer claimed, failed to provide a concrete analysis of social reality, remaining instead on the levels of a "phenomenological-logical analysis of style," an "immanent analysis of Weltanschauungen," or other essentially intellectual historical categories.

Clearly Horkheimer was far more hostile to the sociology of knowledge than Marcuse, seeing it as a perversion of the critical idea of ideology in the Marxist tradition with ultimately conformist implications. Significantly, he did not repeat Marcuse's claim that Mannheim was useful in pointing out that Marxism was the theoretical expression of the *praxis* of the working class. Even though he fervently argued for the necessity of transforming rather than merely understanding the world, he refrained from naming the agency assigned by history to accomplish that task. As a consequence, Lukács' solution to the question of how one might acquire a valid understanding of the world, a solution rooted in the belief that one could understand what one made, could not be embraced by the Frankfurt School. On the positive side of the ledger, this meant that they did not delude themselves, as Lukács did, and believe that the Party spoke for the masses on the basis of an "imputed class consciousness." But on the negative side, it meant that the door was open for what might be described as a neo-Mannheimian solution to the problem of true and false consciousness. For in later years, the Frankfurt School would come to believe that true consciousness rested in the minds of certain critical theorists who were able, for reasons they did not really explore, to avoid the gravitational pull of the prevailing universe of discourse.[30] To be sure, these theorists and their unwitting allies in the art world did not achieve a total, synthetic perspective, as Mannheim had hoped; they had to be satisfied instead with fragmentary negations of the status quo in the name of a superior possibility whose outlines they could only dimly perceive. In this they were less affirmative and harmonistic than Mannheim's free-floating intelligentsia. But in terms of their social rootedness, they began to approach the very status more traditional Marxists have always scorned as characteristic of petit-bourgeois intellectuals who consider themselves above class. Only Walter Benjamin, himself a relatively peripheral figure in the Institut's circle, would try to argue against this tendency in their thinking, and without much success because of his closeness to the distrusted Bertolt Brecht.[31]

30. For an example of this position, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1973), p. 41, where it is argued, "If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms—a stroke of luck they have often enough to pay for in their relations with their environment—it is up to these individuals to make the moral and, as it were, representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it cannot see or, to do justice to reality, will not allow themselves to see."

31. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *New Left Review*, 62 (July-August, 1970).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unfortunately, no real sensitivity to this problem was evident in the next major Frankfurt School statement on Mannheim, Adorno's 1953 essay on *Man and Society in the Age of Reconstruction*, which Mannheim had published during his exile in England in 1940.[32] In many ways, Adorno's arguments duplicated those made in the earlier critiques of his colleagues. "Like its existentialist counterpart," Adorno wrote, "[the sociology of knowledge] calls everything into question and criticizes nothing."[33] Mannheim erroneously took social phenomena at face value, his notion of totality glorified "the social process itself as an evening-out of the contradictions in the whole,"[34] his reliance on the intelligentsia was a justification for elitism, and so on. Where Adorno struck a new note was in charging Mannheim with being at once positivistic and idealistic. Mannheim's English experience, reinforcing his growing movement to the right, had driven him away from the Troeltsch-Lukácsian source of many of his earlier ideas. In fact, the English translation of *Ideology and Utopia* in 1936 had moved it in a far more pragmatist direction than the German original. As Adorno noted, the positivist side was expressed in his naive reliance on "facts" which could be generalized into causal laws. The very search for alleged examples of general laws was highly undialectical in that general laws themselves are hypostatizations of a more fluid reality. The latent idealism resulted from a similar source: the search for abstract laws which rule history, a search which mirrored Mannheim's new fetish of planning with its potentially authoritarian implications.

Having leveled these and other charges, including an attack on what he saw as Mannheim's crude psychologism, Adorno failed to come to grips with the central challenge of the sociology of knowledge as we have noted it above: what is the Archimedean point in which a true consciousness can be said to be grounded? Having long since abandoned Lukács' faith in the proletariat, having nothing but scorn for Mannheim's intellectual class with its implied role of advising the politically powerful, Adorno offered no real alternative which transcended idealism. The closest he came was in the following sentence: "The answer to Mannheim's reverence for the intelligentsia as 'free-floating' is to be found not in the reactionary postulate of its 'rootedness in Being' [presumably the Heideggerean position], but rather in the reminder that the very intelligentsia that pretends to float freely is fundamentally rooted in the very being that must be changed and which it merely pretends to criticize."[35] What is lacking in this sentence is the

32. Mannheim, *Man and Society in the Age of Reconstruction* (London, 1940); the book p. xcvi-cii; for Adorno's review, see footnote 3.
growing optimism about the possibility of democratic planning was first expressed. For a critique, see Kurt H. Wolff's Introduction to *From Karl Mannheim* (New York, 1971), p. xcvi--cii; for Adorno's review, see footnote 3.

33. Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 37.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confidence that true knowledge comes through the very process of changing society. The intellectual, either as an individual or as a group, could not serve as the agent of change. How then certain of their number possessed access to truth, albeit in its negative, fragmentary form, the Frankfurt School could not really say.

After Adorno's attack on *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, only three years went by until the Frankfurt School's next serious encounter with the issues raised by the sociology of knowledge. In 1956, an article on "Ideology" jointly written by members of the Institut, by then once again in Frankfurt, appeared in a volume entitled *Soziologische Exkurse*, recently translated as *Aspects of Sociology*.[36] In the article, the problem of the grounding of knowledge was put aside for a more urgent question: the potential obsolescence of the concept of ideology itself. This fear reflected the Frankfurt School's growing pessimism about the closing off of negation in what Marcuse was to call "one-dimensional society." As usual, Adorno had been the first to sound the tocsin. In the early 1940's, he wrote an article entitled "Cultural Criticism and Society," later reprinted in *Prisms*, in which he warned, "There are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness, only advertisements for the world through its duplication and the provocative lie which does not seek belief but commands silence."[37] This argument, which might be called the Frankfurt School's version of the end-of-ideology, grew out of their belief that liberal society was being replaced by an almost totally "administered world" in which ideological justifications were no longer necessary. The full ramifications of this development were spelled out in the 1956 collective essay.

The very existence of ideology, its authors contended, was historical in nature. Only at the beginning of the bourgeois world, when Francis Bacon had developed his theory of the Idols, or collective prejudices, did the concept first appear. Although Bacon had universalized the Idols to apply to all men at all times, by the Enlightenment and Helvétius and Holbach, the social origins of ideology were beginning to be understood. Bourgeois society needed ideological justification because of its antagonistic character, at once universal and particular. The universal tenets of liberalism were needed to hide the contradictions of class society. Moreover, the possibility of a universal ideology rested on the bourgeois supposition of rational men with an equal access to discursive logic. This egalitarian premise, although only formal in character, was crucial in creating the dialectical potential of ideology in the bourgeois world. That is, substantive ideologies could be confronted with their own truth, which rested in the rational, egalitarian kernel inherent in their attempt at universal justification.

---

36. See footnote 3.
37. Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 34.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the mid-twentieth century, however, these conditions no longer prevailed. The change was most apparent when looking at Nazism, where naked power relations no longer really needed universalist ideologies to justify them. The buffering mediations of bourgeois society—the free market place, civil liberties, the *Rechtstaat*—were all suspended by the Nasiz, who ruled through psychological and political mechanisms that approached a pure form of Hegel's master-slave relationship. The Nazis did not have an ideology in the classical bourgeois sense; their propaganda was a "manipulative contrivance, a mere instrument of power."[38]

Accordingly, the critique of ideology as false consciousness was itself increasingly problematical, for the rational kernel in universal justifications was absent. This change was reflected in the theoretical sphere most clearly in Pareto's cynical reduction of all ideas to derivations of irrational residues, but it had echoes as well in Mannheim's concept of "total ideology," which was incapable of dealing with false consciousness as a reality. In fact, although he did not acknowledge it, Mannheim had returned to the days of Francis Bacon with his ahistorical Idols applicable to all men. Besides the loss engendered by the jettisoning of liberal universalism, even in its formal guise, another critical aspect of the traditional notion of ideology had been lost in Mannheim's work: the truth value latent in the assumption that ideology transcended social roots. The so-called "culture industry" had destroyed the independent moment in ideologies, which had existed in a less administered time. The very idea of "total ideology," the Frankfurt School argued, expressed a rage against the possibility of a superior future. "With the crisis of bourgeois society," the wrote, "the traditional concept of ideology itself appears to lose its subject matter. Spirit is split into critical truth, divesting itself of illusion, but esoteric and alienated from the direct social connections of effective action, on the one hand, and the planned administrative control of that which once was ideology, on the other." [39]

Needless to say, this pessimistic conclusion was a far cry from Marcuse's 1929 review of *Ideology and Utopia* with its praise for Mannheim's understanding of the relations between theory and practice, and an even further one from Lukács' insistence that only the proletariat, and its spokesman, could achieve an undistorted view of reality through their creation of the social world. The article, like much of the Frankfurt School's post-was work, expressed a gloom that can itself perhaps be called one-dimensional. The model of unmediated power relations so blatant that they needed no justification, a model extrapolated from Nazism, soon, in fact, proved inadequate, although it had provided a powerful insight into the potential direction of all late capitalist societies. By the time of

38. *Aspects of Sociology*, p. 190. This point is particularly interesting when seen in contrast to Hannah Arendt's contemporaneously published *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where ideology plays a key role in her analysis of Nazism.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One-dimensional Man in 1964 and the more recent work of Jürgen Habermas, especially his essay, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'," [40] the Frankfurt School was once again using the concept of ideology to denote false consciousness. But in these works, the ideology singled out for debunking was no longer the classical bourgeois notions of civil liberties, free enterprise, and the *Rechtstaat*; instead, they focused on the new ideology of technology and instrumental rationalism as an answer to social conflict, an illusory belief reflected in the then fashionable assumption that ideology had itself ended.

Even Adorno, the most insistent advocate of the total oppressiveness of our "administered world," began to accept the reality of this new ideology. In addition, he pointed to an even greater ideological threat in his *Negative Dialectics*: the philosophical search for first principles or an underlying identity of elements amidst the contradictions of social reality. "Identity is the primal form of ideology," he argued. "Identity becomes the authority for a doctrine of adjustment, in which the object—which the subject is supposed to go by—repays the subject for what the subject has done to it....The critique of ideology is thus not something peripheral and intra-scientific, not something limited to the objective mind and to the products of the subjective mind. Philosophically, it is central: it is a critique of the constitutive consciousness itself." [41]

In so arguing, Adorno was seemingly rejecting the notion of Archimedean points as such. In his polemic against Heidegger, Adorno sought to undermine the primacy of such concepts, or better put, pre-conceptual realities, as Being. Anything smacking of ontology was itself ideological in that reality was inherently contradictory and thus irreducible to any one of its elements. A moment of false consciousness necessarily adhered to the belief that philosophy could adequately conceptualize reality. As the title of his book implied, the correct position was that of a negative dialectics that defied reconciliation.

And yet it can be argued that the Frankfurt School—if such a term can still be applied to such increasingly disparate thinkers as Adorno, Habermas, and Marcuse—had not fully freed itself of the need to establish the ground of a "true" consciousness. Habermas was the most candid in acknowledging the need. In *Knowledge and Human Interests* he sought the answer not in history, as Lukács and the early Frankfurt School had done, but in a brand of philosophical anthropology instead. The three cognition-directing interests he posited were understood to be grounded in the necessary conditions for the production and reproduction of human life itself; a technical interest in the mastery of nature, a hermeneutic interest in widened intersubjective communication, and an emancipatory interest in

40. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964); Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt, 1968).

41. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 148.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the liberation from illegitimate authority and distorted communications. The concept of ideology was useful in unmasking an attempt by any one of these—in the modern world, the technical interest in mastering nature—to assert its absolute hegemony over the others.[42]

Although Habermas' typology was his own, his attempt to dehistoricize the ground of truth was anticipated in the later work of his elders in the Frankfurt School. As the early faith in the world-historical role of the proletariat was shattered, the Frankfurt School moved further and further away from a Lukácsian insistence on the relation between truth and action, which, as we have seen, was dimly echoed in Mannheim's stress on the commitment of his free-floating intellectuals. In the post-war era, Marcuse's decisionist tone of 1929 was completely muted. The appeal to philosophical truth in a manner uncomfortably close to that condemned by Horkheimer in his seminal essay, "Traditional and Critical Theory," began to creep into their writings. In fact, as eary as 1937, Marcuse had written: "When Critical Theory comes to terms with philosophy, it is interested in the truth content of philosophical concepts and problems. It presupposes that they really contain truth. The enterprise of the sociology of knowledge, to the contrary, is occupied only with the untruths, not the truths of previous philosophies."[43] These same sentiments were repeated in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, almost three decades later: "A sociology of knowledge fails before philosophy: for the truth content of philosophy it substitutes its social function and its conditioning by interests while refraining from a critique of that content itself. . . . In the realm of objective truth, materialist dialectics necessarily turns philosophical—despite, and because of, all its criticism of philosophy. A sociology of knowledge, on the other hand, denies not only the objective structure of society but the idea of truth and its cognition."[44]

In the light of earlier Frankfurt School pronouncements on the sociology of knowledge, these statements suggest an important shift, one which was a response to changed social conditions as the Frankfurt School understood them. First, they are noteworthy because they attribute to Mannheim a relativism that is the exact opposite of the absolutism for which Horkheimer had chastised him in his 1930 essay, "A New Concept of Ideology?" And in so doing, it seems to me, they are far less accurate in their description of Mannheim's intentions than Horkheimer had been. Second, they are striking because of the extent to which they suggest the departure of the Frankfurt School from a "functionalist" sociology of knowledge in Werner Stark's sense, which was present in both Lukács and Mannheim. That is, the Frankfurt School no longer accepted the existence of a totality in which thought and institutions, superstructure and substructure have essentially analogical relations. Instead, they approached the position Stark identifies

42. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1971).
43. Marcuse, *Negations*, p. 147-148.
44. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 197-198.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as that of "elective affinity," which he sees operating in the work of Max Weber and Max Scheler. Here the argument is that ideas and social reality may intersect at times in history and reinforce one another, but there is no simple analogical parallel between them and certainly no causal connection. Such an attitude may, in fact, be said to have always been latent in the Frankfurt School's distrust of identity theory, most clearly articulated in Adorno's idea of a negative dialectic without positive reconciliation. For truth must always refer to something transcending the present social reality. At a time when the one-dimensionality of society meant that no social agency was on the horizon to actualize the Marxist dream, it would be impossible to fund a social parallel to a truly negative philosophy.

But what saves the Frankfurt School from a complete identification with the Weber-Scheler position is the muted hope, strongest in Marcuse and weakest in Adorno, that such a reconciled totality might be a future reality. For even amidst the incessant admonitions against identity in *Negative Dialectics*, the following admission is made: "Dialectical reason's own essence has come to be and will pass, like antagonistic society."[45]

Thus, there is an Archimedean point in the Frankfurt School's thinking that is employed as a standard against which false consciousness can be measured. It is not the production of the world by a proletariat which is inherently a universal class, both the subject and object of history, nor the collective perspective of a class of free-floating intellectuals whose integrated views illuminate a harmonious totality in the here and now. The Archimedean point of Critical Theory is the reconciled totality that will accompany the end of the story, similar to the type of synoptic view one gets at the very end of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Although it is impossible to flesh out this fulfilled condition and give it concrete substance—an impossibility Horkheimer would come to explain by a reference to the Jewish taboo on naming or picturing God—it functions nonetheless as the ultimate ground of cognition.

It is for this reason, I would argue in conclusion, that Walter Benjamin was so fascinated by Paul Klee's painting, "Angelus Novus." The picture as Benjamin describes it in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* "shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history," Benjamin explains. "His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in its wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistably propels him into the future to

45. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which is back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."[46]

Fragments of the truth, so the Frankfurt School believed, can be found among the debris, but the whole truth is only visible to the angel as he retreats into the future. An almost Kantian agnosticism about the limits of reason began to reemerge in their later writings. Without a faith in angels or the usefulness of final reconciliations as the ground of truth, however, the rest of us may well be left with the feeling that as in other instances, the Frankfurt School has punctured the claims of rival theoretical positions without, alas, offering a truly satisfactory alternative. For from the point of view of Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory"—that is, from an immanent vantage point within the Frankfurt School's own tradition—the challenge of the sociology of knowledge to the doctrine of true and false consciousness has not yet been convincingly refuted.

---

46. Walter Benjamin, "These on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), p. 259-260.

FORTHCOMING FROM *TELOS* PRESS:

The Mirror of Production

by Jean Baudrillard

Are the concepts of labor and of production adaptable to a developing industrial society? What is the meaning of "pre-industrial organization"? In attempting to answer these questions, Jean Baudrillard examines the lesson of Marxism which has created a productivist model and a fetishism of labor. He argues that we must break the mirror of production which "reflects all of Western metaphysics" and free the Marxist logic from the restrictive context of political economy whence it was born. Expected publication date: October 1974. Price: $2.50 paperbound.

approximately 132 pages.

Order your copy from *Telos*, c/o Department of Sociology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. Include payment to avoid extra postage charges. Foreign orders add 10%. Make all checks or money orders payable to *Telos*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

L'Idiot de la famille: *The Ultimate Sartre?*

by Ronald Aronson

For virtually his entire career Jean-Paul Sartre has been an activist writer. His very first book, *Imagination* (1936), has a tone of aggressive combat as Sartre attacks past theorists for their faulty views of imagination. Throughout his early writings Sartre passionately opposes false claimants to the truth—such as Freud in *The Emotions*, or Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego*—and "at long last" sets forth the correct approach. His little essay "Une Idee" presents Sartre's discovery of intentionality in a spirit of exultation.[1] Even Sartre's early literary criticism—I am thinking of his affirmative articles on Dos Passos and Faulkner and his criticism of Mauriac—has a driving, impassioned quality. Sartre's tone makes sense to us when we see that what is at stake in each case according to him is no less than human nature itself. Are humans passive, externally conditioned things or are we free and self-determining? Sartre's intellectual mission in these early writings cannot be separated from a moral mission: to make people aware of their freedom. *Nausea*, most of the stories collected in *Intimacy*, the novels of *Roads to Freedom*, *No Exit*, *The Flies*, even *Being and Nothingness*, all express Sartre's moral mission. These words want to reveal to us both our freedom and the ways in which we evade it. They exhort us to throw aside our illusions and dodges and face squarely our "monstrous spontaneity."

In all of these works Sartre writes with grand and noble purposes: to find and make us see the truth, in order to affect how we act. Words for him are not neutral, are not merely academic, but are rather tools. Writing is a form of action. When he declares this as he discovers Marxism he is merely imparting a political tinge to his long-established practice. Sartre's writing remains a moral undertaking. Whether directed at Moscow, the French Communist Party, the French bourgeoisie, leftist intellectuals, or people in general, Sartre's political writings seek to create self-awareness and provoke change.

In all this Sartre overvalues the power of words. His overvaluing of words, his overemphasis on subjective freedom and spontaneity comes from Sartre's sense of being overwhelmed by the world, his urge to find a secure refuge and field of action.[2] In his thought, I have argued, the opposing terms structurally entail each other—be it passive perception and self-determining

---

1. "Une Idée Fondamentale de la 'Phénomenologie' de Husserl: L'intentionnalité," *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise* (1939), p. 1.
2. See my essay, "Interpreting Husserl and Heidegger: The Root of Sartre's Thought," *Telos* Number 13, Fall, 1972.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imagination, an overwhelming world and the free individual, absurd reality and rigorous art, man the "useless passion" and art the successful passion, "hell is other people" and writing-reading seen as the City of Ends, the practico-inert and individual *praxis*.[3]

From the very beginning Sartre fought against the dualism implied by his conceptual structure and rejected the implications of his own thought. In *Nausea*, for example, he attacks the "stupid jerks" who promote art as a realm of consolation, and yet there is precisely where his own thought leads. Separating the individual from the world he creates in common with others, Sartre engenders an overwhelming world which must be fled and a menaced, isolated individual whose freedom must be defended at all costs. What keeps this from becoming a full-blown dualism? The answer is Sartre's activist impulse, his sense of intellectual and ethical mission, his determination to overcome the separation his thought creates by insisting that the individual become active in the world. Individuals are free, yes, but they are *situated* freedoms. And they should become *engaged*.[4]

Sartre's extreme optimism about writing overlies, therefore, an extreme pessimism about the reality he would change. This contradiction has been the key to that combination of missionary zeal, commitment to freedom and deep-seated negativism which we know as existentialism. It has also been the key to Sartre's failure as an activist writer. In *The Words* (1964) he admits his failure, however. And following on that admission he begins to give up that activism of words, separating writing from political action. By the 1970's the intellectual activist has become intellectual *and* activist. Whatever he does in his study high above Paris, the political tasks take place below, on the streets, such as hawking *La Cause du Peuple* and helping the masses to express themselves.

The separation of moral-political action from writing is a major event in Sartre's career: for the first time he writes without a worldly, practical mission. Remove this activist impulse and what happens to Sartre's thought? *L'Idiot de la famille* gives us the answer. Sartre's *Flaubert* reflects his thought freed from responsibilities, relieved of missionary duties, purged of its activism. It is, in short, Sartre's first wholly *scholarly* work. Scholarly: Sartre does not try to bring us to act or think differently, to expose us to ourselves or to convince us of a vital truth. Not since the descriptive sections of *Psychology of Imagination* has Sartre been so immersed in studies without immediate life-relevance. Indeed, he is willing to stop imposing on us and to leave us to follow his pursuit of his subject. In this very healthy sense Sartre's readers count for less in *L'Idiot de la famille* than in virtually any of his writings and his subject matter counts for more. He is interested in Gustave Flaubert as an example of what we can know about a person and for his own

3. See my essay, "Sartre's Individualist Social Theory," *Telos* 16, Summer 1973.
4. See, for example, *What Is Literature?*, written in 1947.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sake—not for any warnings we may draw from his failures, as with Baudelaire, and not for any paths to liberation he may open up for us, as with Genet.

The work does have global importance for him, however, but it is of a scholarly sort. "Its subject: what can we know about a man these days? It seemed to me that the only way to answer this question was to study a specific case: what do we know about Gustave Flaubert, for instance."[5] Transforming his audience has ceased to matter, but this shift has simply intensified Sartre's urge to grasp the world in words: "The underlying plan in my Flaubert is to show that, eventually, everything can be communicated and that—without being God, being a man like any other—one can arrive at a perfect understanding of another man as long as one has all the information necessary."[6]

Thus does Sartre's energy, freed from its activism, turn into one of the most incredible intellectual encounters in history. To communicate everything, to understand Flaubert completely—this, and no less, is Sartre's goal. And to do so he writes a study which, when completed, will contain roughly as many words as Gustave Flaubert's entire collected works! I have suggested that Sartre ceases to oppress his readers when he gives up on changing us. But if he leaves us in peace in one way Sartre certainly oppresses us even more in another. 2800 pages so far, Sartre's *Flaubert* is absolutely overwhelming. Freed from the usual restraints imposed by his past political and moral purposes, Sartre seems now able to indulge himself and write as much as he likes. *L'Idiot de la famille* makes the enormities of *Being and Nothingness* (722 pages), *Saint Genet* (578 pages) and *Critique de la raison dialectique* (755 pages) appear modest and self-disciplined by comparison.

Freed from responsibilities, Sartre's thought returns to one of its basic and original impulses: concern with the imaginary. Sartre's starting point of the 1930's led from and to the imaginary as the unreal realm where real life's basic contradictions and problems would be temporarily resolved. In his turn towards political activism after World War II Sartre suggested that political action might overcome some of these problems, and argued forcefully that imaginary work, particularly writing, had a real political function. And some of his best political plays showed his characters trapped in the imaginary, unable to act in, or even face, the real world. But by never abandoning and going beyond the basic terms of his thought, Sartre doomed from the outset his radical intellectual project.

His plays were too absorbed by the *problem* of relating to reality and the temptation to escape into imagination; his political essays had too much of

5. *L'Idiot de la famille* (Paris, 1971), Vol. 1, p. I, tr. in *Le Monde Weekly*, May 20-26, 1971, p. 6.
6. "Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre" by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Le Monde Weekly*, June 17-23, 1971, p. 6.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the unreal, the imaginary, the arbitrary construct in them. Sartre's *littérature engagée* never became *real*. His Marxist philosophy was contradicted by his fight to establish a preserve of individual freedom and this became merely academic. It was doomed by its inability to cast off the imaginary pole and fully accept and plunge itself into the real, social, historical world. Relating to the real world, then, Sartre's thought was vitiated by the imaginary. And so his return to Flaubert has the earmarks of a *re-turn*: locked into his conceptual structure, Sartre simply throws overboard the impulse to activism and returns, in a far more sophisticated way, to explore his basic theme of withdrawal into the imaginary. This Sartre is right to speak of his *Flaubert* as a sequel both to his early *Psychology of Imagination* and his later *Search for a Method*.[7] To continue his studies of how the imaginary is created, to understand a man fully: both scholarly impulses get completed in his Flaubert.

A study of a person who lived out his life in the imaginary, *L'Idiot* is also an imaginary work in itself. Much of it is an elaborate construct built from relatively little evidence. Here it is useful to compare Sartre's *Flaubert* with a more conventional biography, such as Enid Starkie's *Flaubert: The Making of the Master*.[8] Of Gustave's mother, Starkie tells us only that she was "of a gloomy disposition" plus the few available facts of her life. Starkie's implied methodological premise is to stick as closely as possible to the facts, to venture hypotheses rarely and only when she explicitly indicates their hypothetical character. Her goal is less to explain Gustave than to describe him. Sartre, on the other hand, begins with the facts as sighting-points for his project of understanding. And since explanations on one level entail yet other levels, Sartre moves further and further from the facts in building the terms of Gustave's character structure. Thus, from the available evidence he builds an entire chapter on Caroline Flaubert, explaining how she *must have* felt and what her needs *must have* been. Orphan of a physician, foster child of another, she became the devoted wife of yet another. Her obedience, together with Achille-Cléophas' rural petty-bourgeois background and domination of the family, made his wife into his "incestuous daughter," and "eternal minor." Thus Gustave's mother *must have* wanted to furnish Achille-Cléophas with an heir and welcomed Achille's birth. Thus she *must have* wanted a daughter in whom she could relive, with parental care and love, her own childhood. Thus she *must not have* wanted Gustave, and in consequence *must have* cared for him meticulously without loving him. Thus Gustave *must have* been cared for yet deprived, and out of this combination developed his passive way of relating to reality.

---

7. See "Questioning Jean-Paul Sartre," *New Left Review* Number 58, p. 53, and *L'Idiot*, Vol. I, p. 7.
8. London, 1967; Paperback ed., 1971.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In moving so quickly, of course, I fail to do justice to Sartre's analysis. My point is, rather, to demonstrate what Sartre himself emphasizes, namely that hard evidence is unavailable at the level on which he tries to understand Flaubert, that to *explain* him Sartre can write only about "Flaubert as I imagine him."[9] This odd formula indicates that Sartre is writing what he calls a "true novel." "I would want my study read as a novel since it is history, indeed, of an apprenticeship which leads to the failure of a whole life. I would want at the same time for you to read it while thinking that it is the truth, that it is a *true* novel." By this Sartre means a study which is rigorous and yet, when necessary, he will construct its own materials. "It is Flaubert such as I imagine him; but, having methods which appear to me to be rigorous, I think it is Flaubert such as he is, such as he has been. In this study, I have need of imagination at each instant."

This is remarkable: *the* definitive study of Flaubert is at the same time a literary construct of who he must have been, a biographical novel. Sartre is self-consciously creating a new genre. Does this reliance on imaginary constructs in the midst of a rigorous and systematic study indicate that, finally, Sartre's thought is giving in and becoming consumed by its imaginary pole? The point is that Sartre is returning to that original pole of his thought in form as well as content: an imaginary study of an imaginary person. And if this doesn't convey the sense of withdrawal strongly enough, we should be clear that this is an *interior* study. Sartre traces the formation of Gustave's subjectivity, his intentional structure, and not any worldly action or pattern of actions. Once again Sartre's Flaubert is the opposite of Starkie's: she is above all concerned with what Gustave *does*, and so observes him from the outside. However Sartre's approach may be dictated by his goal of understanding Gustave, the book's pervading impression of withdrawal *vis-à-vis* Sartre's earlier worldly projects is too strong to shake off: an imaginary study of the interior development of an imaginary person. A work of escape about an escapist?

All this has been to view *The Family Idiot* from the outside, in the context of Sartre's entire *corpus*. Read for itself, both these hints of brilliance and of defeat get borne out, and Sartre's Flaubert assumes an amazing dual spectre. It is a magnificent book and a terrible one, the one alongside the other, one inside the other, in the same pages, the same paragraphs, the same words. It is a gamble, the most extreme effort in a corpus of extreme efforts. I shall get to how it fails soon enough, but first I must pay my respects.

The reviews, as I will show, have not criticized *L'Idiot* enough, but neither have they praised it enough. In it Sartre once again scandalizes most academics by trying to grasp the whole, by refusing to accept limits in trying

9. "Entretien Avec Jean-Paul Sartre," by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Le Monde*, May 14, 1971, p. 20.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to discover and communicate everything one can know about a person today. With unequalled energy Sartre sets himself against all intellectual cynicism. I marvel at his optimism and his effort.

How do we go about understanding anyone? Most biographies embody an unholy mélange of the most contradictory approaches, remaining tentative and unsure of their goals and methodological principles beginning to end. Thus Starkie, while refusing to speculate about Gustave's deeper motivations or his emotional conflicts, assumes that the city of Rouen must have affected Gustave's character and so devotes more space to discussing it than to discussing his mother. Thus she confirms Gustave's homosexuality but refuses to speculate about his hostility to his brother Achille. Thus she refuses to explore the possible autobiographical meaning of Gustave's early writings while acutely considering and resolving many disputed problems of Flaubert scholarship. Starkie accepts her methods as ready-made and is above all concerned to give us a *picture* of Gustave. And she does so: his actions, the main events of his life, his development as a writer, his friendships and love affairs, the structure and meaning of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert's aesthetic doctrine. All this is taken up through 1857 in only 400 pages of text, with a second volume given over to the rest of Flaubert's life.

Compare this very successful conventional work with Sartre's *Flaubert*. Its subject, we heard Sartre say, is to find out what we can know about a man today. One can answer this general question only by studying a specific case: "what do we know—for example—about Gustave Flaubert?"[10] *Par exemple*! Critics of *L'Idiot* are irritated by the apparently ancillary role given to Flaubert himself. But Sartre is after all developing a method in this study. Whether or not we are interested in Flaubert, he wants to leave us with a systematic and self-conscious biography which we can apply elsewhere. Compared with Starkie's relatively unselfconscious, eclectic, and even contradictory method, Sartre is concerned to know exactly where he is going at every moment and why. It is not enough, then, to simply say that Gustave's mother didn't love him, or that he had difficulty grasping the meaning of language, or that he gave himself over to play-acting. In each case Sartre must set out the general framework within which such analyses take place: how love is connected with self-valuation with an active approach to the world; what language means as one of the child's first encounters with the world; the meaning of acting. This constructing of frameworks continues throughout the book, time and again taking us away from Gustave in order to develop the tools for understanding him. Thus the biography becomes philosophy, becomes psychological theory, becomes the biography of Alfred Le Poittevin, the study of laughter as a social fact, the history of Rouen College during the 1830's, the explanation of how pet dogs relate to human language.

10. *L'Idiot de la famille, op.cit.*, vol. 1, p. 7.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No stone is left unturned in this model biography, but this is only one reason why it is so much longer than Starkie's *Flaubert*. By page 2136 Sartre has gotten through Flaubert's seizure of early 1844, a point which Starkie reaches by page 120 of her account. Gustave is 22, and will now abandon the law for a semi-invalid state and a writing career. But while for Starkie the major events are yet to come, Sartre regards the decisive steps as having already been taken. Starkie's brevity and Sartre's verbosity, then, are also due to the very different ways Starkie and Sartre see Flaubert.

What does it mean to understand someone completely? Starkie's very conventional and not at all unworthy solution is to describe him as fully as possible. Certain areas yield no conclusive answers; they will be left out. For the rest she assembles all the available facts in an interesting and swiftly-moving account. We see Gustave, from the outside, and quite well. In reading Gertrude Collier's *Memior*, for example, Starkie observes "the extraordinary beauty and charm of Flaubert at twenty, and the originality and naturalness of his bearing. As we have already seen, he was tall, slight and graceful in all his full movements, he had the most faultless limbs and the great charm of utter unselfconsciousness in his own physical and mental beauty."[11]

Nothing could interest Sartre less than such details. *L'Idiot* seeks to explain Gustave Flaubert, not to describe him. Sartre assumes that we have much information at our finger-tips—that we have read Flaubert's major works, that we already know the details of his biography. *L'Idiot* is an *interior* biography: to explain Gustave, to understand why he wrote *Madame Bovary* and what he meant by it, we must go beneath the available information and grasp his underlying character structure. Who was Gustave Flaubert? On one level, everything he did and said; but on a far more important level, Gustave was a particular project flowing from his particular way of experiencing and pursuing his needs in all their contradiction and complexity.

Sartre's approach allows for no pluralism or drift either within or without. Set at a very early age, Gustave's life is his project, unfolding itself across time: the interior exteriorized. To be ambivalent or lackadaisical would itself be a project, as would merely flowing with events. These are various ways of being oneself: of organizing one's needs and purposes and projecting them outward coherently. All this is to say that humans are *intentional*. We act in order to achieve purposes; our life is that coherent set of actions.

Thus the need for an *interior* study, which tries to get to the project behind Gustave's actions, which tries to reconstruct Gustave's underlying character structure. Sartre's first goal is to locate the main elements of Gustave's constitution and then he will go on to show them unfold themselves in time.

---

11. Enid Starkie, *Flaubert: The Making of the Master, op.cit.*, p. 88.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These elements have a very definite source: early childhood. Sartre's bitter book on Baudelaire pays no attention to the poet's childhood, but rather assumes a kind of freedom to change in terms of which Baudelaire must be judged as escapist. His Genet dwells briefly on the child and discovers there the problem which must be overcome later, but not the project to overcome it which is Genet's liberation. His short study of Tintoretto begins when the painter is already a young man of thirty, passionately trying to win a master's reputation. *The Words*, on the other hand, focusses on early childhood, but not at all with an analytical eye. Sartre locates there only a general sense of his schooling in the imaginary as a way of avoiding reality; no problems or contradictions, no project which his life will carry out. *L'Idiot*, then, is his first effort to root the adult so wholly in the infant. Little Gustave, he tells us, will be born into a feudal family ruled by a *pater familias* who also happens to be a self-made man of science. This bourgeois family bearing a deep trace of his father's rural origins will produce an heir, Achille, destined to succeed his father as Master of the Hôtel-Dieu of Rouen. And it will produce a second son, Gustave, destined to be inferior to the firstborn, and a girl, longed for by his mother as a way of reliving more happily her own sad early years. The other children died at or near birth, so that from the beginning Gustave was handled and cared for as someone bound to die. Destined for inferiority, lacking any avenue of revolt in this semi-feudal family, cared for meticulously but never loved, Gustave early developed his main character traits: passivity, a sense of destiny, an inability to relate to the real world.[12] He did indeed have a "Golden Age" after about three or four, when his father loved him and took him around the countryside on his house calls. But lacking the early reciprocity of mother-love, Gustave developed no sense of the reciprocity of language: his father cast him out of grace when, at seven, he could not yet read. This child will become imaginary; he will become actor, then author, then poet, then artist. The artist will write *Madame Bovary*.

Is this a Freudian account? Only generally. Sartre makes no use of Freudian concepts, such as repression, the unconscious, the tripartite personality structure, or the stages of sexual development. He insists on the primacy of early childhood, of family structure, of relations between infant and parents. But his is a rather unusual determinism: "There is spontaneity but starting from a prefabricated essence."[13] Meaning that, indeed, Gustave does develop his own "free singular project," but only on the basis of the given internal and external conditions and only along the route made necessary by that network of conditions. Accepting all these qualifications does not lead Sartre to any behaviorist determinism or mechanistic

12. For a good, if ironic, summary of this analysis see the review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, September 24, 1971, p. 1133.
13. *L'Idiot, op.cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 351, n. 1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

causality. People are still people and they behave dialectically: creating themselves on the basis of, but by going beyond, the given conditions. Thus Gustave Flaubert—or any of us—is above all a project, a center of intentionality.

More Freudian than his earlier Genet, *L'Idiot* is also more Marxist. Gustave's character structure takes shape within the contradictions of the Flaubert family. And the family—parvenu but patriarchal, resting on individual ability but seeking to found a dynasty—localizes its socio-historical reality and intimately conveys it to Gustave. Furthermore, for orientation and self-clarification the growing child was forced to choose between or somehow combine not an infinite variety of attitudes, but his father's bourgeois atomistic rationalism and his mother's deism. Family structure and parent's ideologies did not merely *influence* Gustave: his project took shape *through* them, so that he constituted himself *in terms of* them. Thus, for example, the mature Gustave's reactionary political attitudes are prefigured in his early relationship of vassalage towards his father, in his rejection of bourgeois values of self-sufficiency and independence, in his desire to live as a rentier.

Gustave Flaubert is above all a socio-historical being, a *singular universal.* At college at Rouen from 1831-38 he experienced, with the other schoolboys, the collapse of bourgeois universalism, the realization of how narrow were the bourgeois claims to freedom and democracy, the capitualtion of the bourgeoisie to the church. Time for activism and politics were over: together, at night, they retreated into the imaginary, living out their fantasies in romantic novels, plays and poetry. For some of the schoolboys this was necessary preparation, for after 1830 the demands on literature were such that the writer had to be a neurotic. Caught between its eighteenth-century demand for autonomy as a political force and the nineteenth-century fact that the bourgeoisie were in power and wanted it to sing their praises, literature asserted its autonomy in an aestheticist, abstract way. Thus did it preserve itself and avoid having to serve unappreciative masters; but thus did it also stake out an increasingly self-enclosed and unreal world. Those most capable of flourishing in this world of withdrawal were those, like Gustave, who wrote as an expression-solution of their neurosis.

Here, it should be obvious, is a marked shift from every one of Sartre's other writings. In *L'Idiot* we see him acknowledge the priority in human development of *a mandate to live* over the feeling of being *de trop*, which *Nausea* and *being and Nothingness* made so much of. We see him now say that "pure lived life, the simple 'being-there,' in short incarnating in itslef, in succession, every form of our *savored* (*dégustée*) facticity are convenient abstractions which we never encounter without being affected by them ourselves—in osolating certain elements of interior experience, in passing deliberately over others in silence."[14] If pure life itself is not primary, then

14. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what is? Not individual *praxis*, because, we are now told, it emerges only in and through a social world. *L'Idiot* differs from every one of Sartre's early biographical and autobiographical ventures in that it situates Gustave's development squarely in a socio-historical world and finds him developing *in terms of* that world. On a theoretical level we can see this striking shift expressed in his comment on the theme of "sense and non-sense": "In truth sense and non-sense in a human life are human in principle and are transmitted to man in the earliest stages of his life by man himself. Thus we must dismiss those absurd formulas: 'life has sense'; 'it has none'; 'it has one that we give to it'—and understand that we discover our goals, the nonsense or the sense of our lives as realities prior to this coming to consciousness, prior perhaps to our birth and prefabricated in the human universe. The sense of a life comes to the living man through the human society which sustains him and through the parents who engender him: for this reason it is also *always* a non-sense. But inversely the discovery of a life as non-sense (that of children who are supernumeraries, undernourished, consumed by parasites and fever in an underdeveloped society) reveals just as clearly the real sense of this society and, through this reversal, it is life—as organic need—which becomes, in its pure animal necessity, *human sense* and it is the society of men which, by the sentence of unsatisfied need, becomes *pure human non-sense*."[15]

This approach is, of course, no more strictly Marxist than Sartre's approach to Flaubert's infancy is strictly Freudian. Sartre, for example, pays no attention to the concrete social relations or material conditions of the Flaubert family's life, or of the Rouen schoolboys, or of the nineteenth-century French writer. His Marxism is more general: a sense that Gustave is a historical individual, a singular universal, and that he can be understood only in terms of social realities; a sense that those realities, such as the family, have structures which pre-form the experiences in and through which individuals become individuals. History and society precede Gustave and make him what he is. And this happens through the family, society's primary shaping institution. Sartre's Marxian line thus joins his Freudian one as he argues that adequate love leads to self-worth which alone enables us to relate to the world reciprocally, from strength. Gustave's early inability to accept words as designating objects shows that he has been cut off from *praxis*, the cardinal society category, by his earliest contact with his mother. "In this first moment acculturation without love reduces Gustave to the condition of a domestic animal."[16]

Gustave Falubert, then, is the person produced in and by this set of conditions. He has no unique instinctual drives, no special talents, no inherited traits, no essence of his own which meets and is affected by these conditions. Rather, he *is* that set of conditions, as interiorized, lived,

15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

totalized, formed into a project, and re-exteriorized. Any male child, we might assume, born into that family on that date would have made himself to be Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary*.

This brief description of Sartre's purposes has included a good deal of appreciation. Every aspect I pointed to contains serious faults, and beyond these many individual shortcomings are simply fundamental problems about the project itself. But whatever its weaknesses this book remains admirable, this interior biography and methodological study using generally Freudian and Marxist methods to completely explain Gustave Flaubert. Towards the end of his article on *L'Idiot*, the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer asks why Sartre wrote the book in the first place. In probing for the book's deepest purposes he suggests that Sartre may have a parodistic intention at heart: "It seeks out the heart of the whole suspect enterprise of literature, of literary scholarship, of criticism. It would subvert no less than the whole, perhaps inhuman, perhaps lunatic, world of words about words, of language parasitic of language, in which Sartre grew up and which he has been troubled, increasingly self-contemptuous master."[17] Burying himself—and us—in words to destroy them: it is an interesting idea, but it lacks appreciation. The reviewer can approach the strengths of Sartre's project only ironically. He regards Sartre with the overly-sophisticated contempt of someone who will never be caught attempting too much or building too grandly, who will never make the mistake of saying too much based on too few facts. David Caute's review begins with a similar tone, wittily scoring points against the man who would make such foolish mistakes, who would return, after all these years, to "the old bedevilled theory of infrastructure and superstructure, of the determining material factor and the determined intellectual reflection. This monist system of explanation is just as lethal when it sings 'family' as when it sings 'means of production'."[18] These reviews are bad not because their authors' criticism is wrong, but because of their tone of superiority. They can regard Sartre's new effort at understanding *only* with annoyance, poking fun at his task (Caute: "Try this for size: 'What can one know of woman today? For example, Joan of Arc'."[19]) when they are not trying to fathom why on earth he undertakes it. Whatever else it is, *L'Idiot* is a colossal undertaking, a remarkable effort by one human being to understand another down to his most subtle and contradictory intentions. For this, and from its many promising directions it deserves more appreciation than condescension.

Still, it is a terrible book, the kind of book that makes you want to throw it down and shout: "Won't he ever shut up?" If, as Joseph H. McMahon points out, the *Critique* merely "comes close" to cancelling itself out because of its many faults, then *L'Idiot* succeeds completely. It should not be read,

17. *Times Literary Supplement, op.cit.*, p. 1135.
18. "The Refusal to be Good," *Modern Occasions*, Winter, 1972, p. 311.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and, except for Sartre's friends, a few Sartre or Flaubert scholars, or Ph.D. candidates in search of a new field to explore, it won't be. Why? Because it can't be. *L'Idiot de la famille* violates elementary rules of human communication which the political Sartre expressed so well in *What Is Literature?* It has no respect for the reader and makes impossible demands on him; it is undisciplined, self-indulgent, boring and unreal.

Its actual physical length alone is oppressive. My comparison with Flaubert's collected works should give us some sense of scale: is there really that much of importance to say about Gustave Flaubert's first thirty-six years? *L'Idiot* forces us to raise the question of *book* length. What does it mean, after all, to say that a book is too long.

Certainly appropriate book length depends to some extent on the book's content. But such relativism can be deceptive, as you can see by thumbing through the books on any shelf of your own library. The overwhelming majority of book-length writings fall between two and four hundred pages, with decreasing numbers in each additional hundred pages up to, say eight hundred. The point is that book length is determined not by the requirements of the subject alone, but by the requirements of the subject *comprehended* and *communicated*. And it seems that there is fairly limited range within which most full-length studies fall. Below a certain length it seems that the subject is not being treated adequately, and beyond that it seems that comprehension gets distorted by excessive length. The human mind will only hold so much of a subject at one time, be it a scientific study, or a story, or a biography. Between such upper limits of ordinary book length and Sartre's 2800 pages lies a no man's land which staggers the imagination, let alone the possibilities of understanding. All of that psychic information and speculation about Flaubert simply cannot be kept in any one mind long enough to form a coherent picture.

Thus a book which is supposed to communciate to us a profound understanding of Gustave Flaubert itself demands to first be mastered—to be studied over a period of months and even years, again and again to be synthesized and boiled down in our mind and on paper. It is not just an impossibly long but interesting, coherent story. It *feels* long from the very beginning. What makes *L'Idiot* too long? For one thing, Sartre makes no distinction between his activity of study and its socially meaningful results. He insists that we accompany his exploration, rather than being willing to give us its conclusions. It is up to us to distill its meaning, after following him through thick and thin, through feast and famine, down each and every byway he chooses to explore. He is verbose, of course, but that is not the problem. The problem is that communicating a total understanding for Sartre means taking us on his rounds and exploring every conceivable source of insight rather, say than establishing a basic pattern and indicating, using summaries and footnotes, that the analysis is thus corroborated or thus extended by the subsequent sources. I think of our wearisome journey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through Flaubert's juvenilia which establishes the elements of his attitude towards his father. In one exhausting section Sartre forces us to follow him through *Passion et Vertu, Quidquid volueris, Rêve d'enfer, Bibliomanie, La Peste à Florence, Un Parfum à sentir*, and Gustave's literary journal of age thirteen. 130 pages devoted to roughly an equal number in Flaubert! Certainly we should note that Sartre doesn't analyze every one of Flaubert's early writings: he has enough sense to select the most relevant ones. But he plunges into them with a total disregard for proportion, for the reader's staying power, and for good scholarship. It seems that he is proving, proving, proving his analysis at every point. And to prove it he must reconstruct the meaning at every point. And to do this he must write on and on. Frankly, I trust conventional scholarly methods: It would have been enough for him to briefly outline each work, to speak of their decisive elements, and then to add them together in a total picture of the child's basic attitudes.

No discrimination or pruning in *L'Idiot*: each and every detail, each moment of Gustave's shaping process, calls out to us with equal urgency. And so we scarcely ever know if we are in the main stream or in the backwaters.

This is bad scholarship. No distinction here between investigation and its intelligible, communicable results; no sense of proportion about what is and isn't important; no sense of what constitutes adequate proof. Thus he drones on, hammers home the same points again and again, rebuilds his basic analysis over and over. The subject seems always about to get out of hand, and Sartre seems always to be grasping after it, to be laboring frantically to reproduce it. And so in addition to its sheer length the book takes on a slipshod, chaotic, overstuffed quality. Whatever became of the mutual respect between readers and writer, to the pact between freedoms? Instead of meeting us as equals in the social world of scholarly communication, Sartre imposes on us his more private and subjective world and forces us to accompany *his* journey through each and every turning. The book's every aspect only strengthens our sense of its involuted, inward, unreal quality. Unreal: as if in writing it Sartre has left the social world and withdrawn into an inner world wholly of his own making. Unreal: it takes place wholly inside a person, this side of his worldly action, and develops mostly by means of Sartre's imaginary constructs.

L'Idiot contains nearly no action. The extended textual analysis of Flaubert's juvenilia, for example, occurs as part of one of two chapters which together take up 468 pages. In these pages Gustave commits not a single act! Their entire space is given over to a study from several directions of his intentional structure. First the basic elements are isolated, using his early writings; then Sartre reconstructs the relationship between each developing layer of Gustave's character structure, showing how one passes into and produces the next; finally they are cast in terms of how Gustave lived them in relation to his parents' ideologies. But perhaps Sartre is simply isolating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elements here in his regressive analysis of Gustave's constitution. Perhaps the book's second part, on "personalization," will tell us how he acted to make himself from these elements. Will we then see him in action, at play, with family and friends?

Hardly. Sartre merely touches on him performing his first plays in the billiard room of the Hôtel-Dieu's master's lodgings, then entering college, then clowning around with his schoolmates, reading at night, rebelling and getting expelled. The only action he focusses on is internal: Gustave's slow transformation from imaginary child into artist. This process of self-creation is, after all, what *L'Idiot de la famille* is all about. It is not the story of an adventurer or politician, but of a writer—and one whose inner life was primary. In part, then, the book's inwardness stems from its choice of subject. But only in part: Starkie's *Flaubert* is a lively and interesting story. The events which matter little to Sartre interest her and us. What Sartre gives us, on the other hand, is a detailed analysis of their *structure* and *meaning*. Thus 250 pages near the end of the second volume dwell on the extended implications of Gustave's fainting fit at *Pont l'Eveque*, which led to his semi-invalid life, and to which Starkie gives three pages.

But, after all, I lauded *L'Idiot* for being an interior study. By definition Sartre is interested not in the things Gustave did but in the ways he felt which *led to* the central things he did. The book is trying not to describe Gustave Flaubert but to explain him. This requires a constant looking beneath the surface for structures and meanings. A *flesh-and-blood* picture of the Rouen schoolboys is not what counts but rather exploring their passivity before their fathers' domination, their withdrawal into literature. To account for these things we must get to essentials, to history, to motivation. Beneath the surface: such explanations have none of the drama of descriptions. They leave the events behind us trying to get to their causes, and so reducing their contingency and tension to a comprehensible set of links. If the study seeks reasons and causes and structures perhaps it cannot help but be a bad story. Is *L'Idiot*'s suffocating quality thus a pardonable consequence of its fruitful and new direction?

Or is something wrong when we turn page after page, confront layer after layer of exploration of intention and meaning, without seeing Gustave *do* anything? Is this "true novel" good psychology but terrible reading?

Our boredom guides us to the central question about the book: does this interior study manage to grasp the real Gustave Flaubert? I think not. By focussing entirely on Gustave's interior it gives us a false picture of him, and so fails to redeem its promise to "arrive at a perfect understanding of another man." Such understanding would include, among other things, a sense of how the person lived his life: what he did, how he earned his living, how he explained himself to himself, how the socio-historical structures imposed themselves on him. Yes, I agree with Sartre: Gustave's intentional structure is decisive and that roots itself in earliest childhood. But *what* he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

does is decisive as well. Sartre has not claimed to explore *an* essential but neglected dimension of Gustave which, later, must be placed alongside other dimensions for a complete understanding; rather, in exploring Gustave's interior he claims to be rendering the whole person. No, he is wrong—*the* biography of Flaubert will give us the whole person by showing what he does as well as why.

It may well be that Sartre has saved the objective, active side for his study of *Madame Bovary*. That book, after all, is a magnificent social act committed by its author. But what is to keep Sartre's explication from being merely an equally subjective analysis of the meaning to Flaubert of Flaubert's masterpiece? He has promised to show in it Flaubert's defeat and triumph, which suggests that he may turn to the novel's obvious greatness. But nothing in his first three volumes has prepared us for this: Sartre, unlike Starkie, conveys no sense of Gustave's developing literary talent, no sense of his ability to express and capture experience in socially communicable ways. Gustave dissolves, again and again, into his neurosis. Sartre builds no sense, in short, of him being able to cope, to grasp, to act. So far we know only of his defeat, his escape, his weakness.

Perhaps the most outrageous and bizarre quality of *L'Idiot de la famille* is that it is a series of elaborate constructs. Sartre calls it a "true novel," because it is "Flaubert such as I imagine him": "I imagine that Madame Flaubert, a wife by vocation, was a mother from duty. An excellent mother, but not a charming one: punctual, assiduous, skillful. Nothing more. The younger son was cautiously handled: his swaddling clothes were changed in an instant; he didn't have to cry, he was always fed in the nick of time. Gustave's aggressiveness did not have the opportunity to develop. But he was frustrated: well before weaning but without crying or rebellion; lack of tenderness is scarcely to the pain of love as undernourishment is to hunger. Later, the *ill-loved* child will consume himself; for the moment he does not really suffer: the need to be loved appeared from birth, before the infant would even be able to recognize the Other, but it does not yet express itself by precise desires. Frustration does *not affect* him—or scarcely does so—it *makes* him: I mean that this objective negation penetrates him and that it becomes in him an impoverishment of life: an organic poverty and some ingratitude or other at the heart of life-experience. No anguish, he never has occasion to feel himself abandoned. Nor alone. The moment a desire awakens, it is immediately filled; if a pin pricks him and he cries, a quick hand will remove the pain. But these precise operations are also parsimonious: everything is economized at the Flauberts, even time, which is money. Therefore he is washed, fed, cared for without haste but without useless complaisance. Particularly his mother, timid and cold smiles hardly if at all, and doesn't chatter: why trouble to speak to this child who cannot understand? Gustave has much pain grasping this sparce character of the objective world, of otherness; when he becomes conscious of it, when he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recognizes the faces leaning over his cradle, a first chance of love has already escaped him. He does not find himself, on the occasion of a caress, to be flesh and supreme end. It is now too late, for him to be, in his own eyes, the *destination* of maternal acts: he is their object, that is all. Why? He doesn't know it: A long time will not be required for him to feel obscurely that he is a means. For Madame Flaubert, indeed, this child is the means for accomplishing her duties of motherhood; for the doctor-philosopher from whom the young woman is completely alienated—he is first a means for perpetuating the family. These discoveries will come later. For now, he has bypassed valorization: he has never felt his needs as sovereign necessities, the outer world has never been his jewel-box, his larder, the environment reveals itself to him gradually, as to others, but he has only known it first in this cold and dismal consistency that Heidegger has named '*nur-vorbeillagen.*' The happy necessity of the loved child compensates and transcends his docility as an object to be manipulated; there are in his desires an intangible imperiousness which can appear as the rudimentary form of the project and, in consequence, of action. . . ."[20]

This paragraph, which continues for another page and a half, is typical. In it Sartre builds from the slightest information and imagines what little Gustave must have felt, based on what his mother must have done given how she must have felt, given a few scanty facts about her: her childhood as orphan, her apparent devotion to Achille-Cléophas, her sombre bearing, as reported by her niece. From those few facts at the base Sartre's account spirals upward, producing its own facts as it goes, according to his understanding of basic structures of childhood—until it sights the basic passive and imaginary postures of the mature man, Gustave Flaubert. The book's bulk consists of such inventions, reconstructing Gustave's "personalizations"—the process whereby he shapes his basic project from such elements as these—every step of the way. This particular paragraph, however, is unusual because Sartre follows it with a frank discussion of his way of proceeding: "I confess: this is a fable. Nothing proves that it was like this. And, worse yet, the absence of these proofs—which would necessarily be of singular facts—returns us, even when we create fables, to schematism, to generality: my account fits sucklings *in general,* not Gustave in particular. No matter, I wanted to carry it to its conclusion for this reason alone: the *real* explanation, I can conjecture without the least resentment, could be exactly the opposite of the one that I invent; *in any event* it would have to pass on the ground that I have defined: the body, love. I have spoken of maternal love: This is what fixes the objective category of otherness for the newborn, it is this which in the first weeks permits the infant to feel as *other*—from the moment he is able to recognize it—the satiny flesh of the breast. It goes without saying that filial love—the oral

20. *L'Idiot, op.cit.,* pp. 136-137.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phase of sexuality—goes from birth to the encounter with the Other—it is the conduct of the mother which fixes its limits and intensity, which determines its internal structure. Gustave is immediately conditioned by his mother's indifference; he desires *alone*; his first sexual and alimentary impulse towards a 'flesh-nourishment' is not *reflected* for him by a caress. . . ."[21] Sartre's methodological pause is important. It tells us that he must construct, as any explanation must, that he does so from a firm basis which he is willing to defend. *All* children are shaped, from the outset, by the presence or lack of physical mother-love. And, I suppose, by its quality: anxious, intense, calm, contradictory or whatever. Given this woman, given who Gustave became, what *must have been* their initial relation? The imaginary construct proceeds along rigorously defined channels.

Sartre may be right and it is certainly interesting to entertain such brilliant speculations on occasion. The problem, however, is that a book built on a chain of such speculations is unreadable. On occasion Sartre returns to real life and to facts and observable events: it is a breath of fresh air. But for most of the time we are absorbed in such patently unreal constructions. We can be away from the facts for a while, but we demand the study to be grounded there. A fine balance between the hypothetical and the real asserts itself in judging any work of the mind claiming to represent reality. Certainly all thought, all writing "leaves" reality in some sense, and all thought and writing is a construct. But such constructs claim to be the *concept* of reality: reality rendered, captured, expressed, understood in thought. Extended constructs may thus be useful, but Sartre loses contact with the reality to be described. Not because Sartre isn't trying to *explain* a real person's inner workings, but because in doing so he is forced to construct *too much*. He does not merely fill in a few blanks but rather erects entire chains of experience—such as the Rouen schoolboys' relation to their fathers. There is not enough grounding in reality, not enough rooting in facts and evidence. Gustave Flaubert—and Sartre may indeed understand him—becomes too much a construct of Jean-Paul Sartre's imagination.

Sartre's "imaginary" study, his "true novel" thus contains the worst of both possible worlds. On the one hand, all the staggering interiority of an extended subjective case study; on the other hand, all the unreality of an extended construct. A novel may be unreal, but at least it is *concrete*: it deals with living, breathing people and their *actions*. A case study may occasionally be so interior as *L'Idiot*—but at least it is *factual*: it bases itself on and constantly returns to the factual evidence. Sartre's "true novel" is thus twice removed from reality. Each indulgence Sartre grants himself—the book's length, its lack of proportion and discipline, its total inwardness, and its systematic fable-construction—takes him further from his readers. Each

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

successive demand on us to follow him is overwhelming: taken together, they give us the sense, in the end, that in *L'Idiot de la famille* Sartre has retreated from communication completely. Can, "eventually everything... be communicated"? Eventually, I rather think all Sartre's readers will be gone, and he'll be speaking only to himself.

Sartre at his best and worst: *L'Idiot* is the ultimate Sartre. It should be obvious that his entire career has led to this imaginary study of the interior of an imaginary person. Sartre's thought originally opposed a free person to an unbearable world and gave him no satisfying out but the imaginary. At the same time it rebelled against this conclusion and, until *What Is Literature?* articulated their real uses, looked down on the substitute world of imagination and art. Refusing to accept its own conclusion, Sartre's thought pointed towards the real world. He even spelled out a radical intellectual project which was, however, built on the sandy basis of his conceptual structure. That project's failure began to disturb Sartre, but he chose to criticize his own character in *The Words* rather than tackling the substance of what he was doing wrong. His initial mistake was not in seeing his writing as politically important, but rather in trying to make writing, defined as a refuge and escape, into a political weapon. Thus Sartre's writing never completely enters the social and historical world and at the same time claims too much of a role in that world. No wonder that, after 1968, Sartre begins to abandon an unrealistic and overly demanding intellectual activism.

And so his writing returns to the imaginary. Not to his original terms, but to the pole that he attacked so sharply. Not to *Nausea* but to the route condemned there: to Antoine Roquentin's escape into biography. He goes even further, into the portrayal of a writer, someone whose self-transformation into an imaginary person was the key fact of his life. Sartre clearly and decisively takes the retreat that has been such an issue throughout his career. And with his Flaubert he turns it into a brilliant and triumphal return, creating a monument of human understanding and energy. But it is a sad and shabby return as well. The rich tension between reality and the *irréel* is gone from Sartre's thought, as is the worldly pull, the moralism. In following Gustave Flaubert his thought now leaves the world. It takes up residence outside any realm of human communication. He has taken the ultimate step, for which he so sharply attacked French writers from 1850 to 1900: Jean-Paul Sartre has written a book that nobody will read.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTES AND COMMENTARY:

*Toward a Redefinition of Imperialism**

by Antonio Carlo

When in 1913 Rosa Luxemburg published *The Accumulation of Capital*, one of her critics was Lenin himself who, in a letter, noted how Rosa had reintroduced the old populists' nonsense with which he had already dealt in 1899.[1] In fact, in 1897, the Russian revolutionary had pointed out that exports do not help to realize surplus-value since they are exchanged with imports which must be subsequently absorbed by the internal market.[2] He had thus rejected *ante litteram* Rosa Luxemburg's thesis concerning the need to export commodities in order to realize a surplus unattainable on the internal market, while opening the way for a theory of imperialism locating the essence of the phenomenon not in the exporting of commodities, but in the exporting of capital (i.e., of the very internally unrealizable surplus).

This way of framing the question is the core of *Imperialism*, written by Lenin in 1916 and published the following year, which is implicitly engaged in a polemic with Luxemburg and the populists (in addition to being explicitly aimed against the revisionists of the Second International). At a time when the First World War throws light on the crisis of the system, it was necessary to theoretically arm the proletariat by going to the roots of the basic contradiction—glamorously documented by the war—and by rejecting mistaken theses. If this was the function of Lenin's pamphlet, it was well fulfilled. Yet, today this writing shows deep wrinkles and there is a growing need to re-think the Leninist theory in order to establish its present validity.

Limitations and Contradictions in Lenin's Theory

Lenin writes: "The export of capital influences, greatly accelerates, the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported. While, therefore, the export of capital may tend to a certain extent to arrest development in the capital exporting countries, it can only do so by expanding and deepening the further development of capitalism throughout the world.... On the whole, capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before; but this growth is not only becoming more and more uneven in general, its unevenness also manifests itself, in particular, in the decay of the countries which are richest in capital (England)."[3]

Thus, according to Lenin, the countries that can be defined on the way to (under) development can be expected to grow more rapidly than rich countries which are doomed to stagnation and decay. This is because, in the latter, maturity and stagnation would favor the export of capital towards the "new" countries offering a higher rate of profit. Thus, imperialism would perform a progressive role for emerging nations (in terms of increasing production). Not much more is needed to

---

* Originally published in *Terzo Mondo*, vol. 5, n. 17, September 1972, pp. 8-22.

1. V. I. Lenin, *Opere Complete* (Roma, 1955) Vol. XXXV, p. 56.
2. V. I. Lenin, *Opere Complete, op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 151.
3. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow, n.d.) pp. 107 and 215-16. More ambiguous is Hilferding's position of this point. Cf. Rudolf Hilferding, *Il Capitale Finanziario* (Milano, 1961) pp. 412-13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

point out that Lenin's theory has shown itself to be altogether inadequate to explain the real movement from around 1910 to today since, as is well known, the disparity between rich and poor countries has progressively increased in the last sixty years, while the "new" nations have become much more exporters than importers of capital.[4]

In re-reading *Imperialism* today, the fragmentary and contradictory character of Lenin's position becomes clear. The tables concerning the rich countries' capital exports are not followed by tables dealing with the imports of capital from poor countries.[5] Clearly, if the flow of returning profits from poor countries is higher than the initially invested capital, the disparity between the two zones of the capitalist world will increase, and colonial and neo-colonial countries will be precisely those which, hit by the vital mechanism of accumulation, will stagnate and decay (as it has subsequently happened). Yet, Lenin himself, in another part of his work, emphasizes the growing importance of foreign-produced income for metropolitan capitalism: thus, from 1865 to 1898 such income grows ninefold, while English wealth on the whole only doubles, and serves to maintain the unproductive consumption of a significant mass of rentiers (around a million), or to corrupt labor aristocracies or, finally, to finance extravagant horse-races.[6] The importance and growing weight of re-imported capital is undoubtedly enormous. Yet, in terms of a definition of imperialism, it does not appear among the five famous indicators whereas, towards the end of Lenin's work, appears as the characterizing (dominating) element increasingly more relevant with the increase of the advanced countries' parasitism and decay.

But rich nations cannot be at the same time capital exporters, thus stimulating production and accumulation in poor zones, and capital importers from the colonial sectors of the system, thus blocking the process of accumulation and development. In addition to serious limitations that have already been pointed out by others,[7] *Imperialism* moves entirely within this unresolved contradiction. On the one hand, rich countries have a propulsive function for emerging nations, while on the other, with their growing parasitism, they can only block that development. Nor can it be said that subsequent Marxist literature (both "orthodox" as well as "critical") has thrown any light on the matter.

Furthermore, the Leninist concept of parasitism fits Roman "imperialism" better than the English variety. In fact, it is well known that the Roman empire consumed the wealth produced by conquered people. But in capitalism, and even more so during the phase of monopolies, accumulation prevails over consumption within the entrepreneurial framework.[8] Instead, Lenin claims that in imperial England, because of the stagnation of production, the reimported profits end up by financing the consumption of labor aristocracies and of rentiers, fox-hunts and horse-races.

---

4. On this see Edmondo M. Capecelatro and Antonio Carlo, *Contro la Questione Meridionale* (Roma, 1972), pp. 122ff.
5. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.
7. To a very great extent, Lenin's five characteristics have become obsolete. Cf. Rodolfo Banfi, "A Proposito dell'*Imperialismo* di Lenin," in *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*, n. 23, pp. 421ff.
8. Karl Marx, *Il Capitale* (Roma, 1964), Vol. I, p. 635ff. and P. 671ff. As for monopolies, see Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York, 1942).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At this point we should ask what remains of Lenin's theory of imperialism which appear not only obsolete, but, and what is worse, contradictory from the very beginning.[9] According to Palloix and Parlato, the law of unequal development still remains the valid nucleus of Lenin's thought.[10] As indicated by the citations quoted earlier, for Lenin this unevenness is to be understood in the sense that poor countries would develop more rapidly than rich ones. Without this specific content, clearly stated by Lenin himself, the law would be a simple and vague banality (every country has its peculiar historical development which is irreducible to others). Furthermore, the development hypothesized by Lenin is much less "uneven" than it is commonly believed: in fact, the more rapid development of countries on the road of industrialization would tend to eliminate the disparity with the richer countries, thus re-establishing evenness. The thesis of the classic school (and of Marx) whereby, by means of the system's spontaneous action (the law of the unevenness of the rate of profit), temporary inequalities are gradually eliminated precisely through a flow of capital from rich to poor zones (Lenin's capital export), is the core of Lenin's argument: it is superfluous to reiterate that the economic and social history of the last 60 years glamorously falsify such a prediction.

Imperialism and the Falling Rate of Profits

Here we must deal with the implicit theoretical basis of Lenin's theory, i.e., the law (formulated by Marx) of the tendential fall of the rate of profit. In terms of this law, the countries in which the organic composition of capital (relation between constant and variable capital) is higher, have a lower average rate of profit. This implies that rich countries with a more advanced technology (where the organic composition is higher) suffer an exodus of capital towards poor countries where the rate of profit would be higher.

It is well known, however, that this theory has generated many sound criticisms,[11] and these perplexities are even more justified today when we confront an international movement of capital in precisely the opposite direction.

This is not the place for a lengthy critique of Marx. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out how the concrete dynamic of the law hypothesized in *Capital* is irreconciliable with monopoly capitalism. In fact, several times Marx points out how the rise in the organic composition does not immediately determine the fall of the rate of profit; what is needed is the necessary mediation of competition which, in his scheme, is price competition.[12] Marx writes: "This phenomenon superficially presents only this characteristic: decrease of the mass of profit for the single commodity, *decrease of its price*, increase of the mass of profit on the greater quantity of commodities."[13] And further on: "The capitalist that applies perfected methods of production not yet generalized sells below market prices but above his

9. Even the data on which Lenin based his thesis were inadequate. Cf. P. Santi, "Introduzione" to N. I. Bukharin, *L'Economia Mondiale e l'Imperialismo* (Roma, 1966), p. 41ff.

10. Cristian Palloix, "Critica dell'Economia Politica e Teoria dell'Imperialismo," in *Problemi del Socialismo*, n. 5-6, p. 706; and Valentino Parlato, "Introduzione" to Lenin's *L'Imperialismo* (Roma, 1970), p. 22.

11. Sweezy, *op.cit.*; and Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics* (London, 1942).

12. Karl Marx, *Il Capitale, op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 275ff.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280. Italics added.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own individual production price; *for him the rate of profit increases until competition re-establishes the equilibrium.*"[14]

Clearly, technological innovations preliminarily bring about an increase in the rate of profit up to the point when the innovation is generalized. Together with price competition, this brings about a further fall (an essential moment in the phenomenology of the law) thus flattening the very rate of profit.

In the present system, however, although there are sectors with competitive prices (e.g., agriculture), what is dominating and characterizing is the existence of cartel prices which levitate upward: thus an essential link in Marx's concrete scheme has broken down. Very few Marxists seem to have bothered to reformulate, for the age of monopolies, the dogmatically reiterated Marxian hypothesis. Sweezy's attempt is based on presuppositions all too easily refutable[15] and only Gilman's hypothesis seems to constitute an original and serious effort to restate the problem. For him, the fall of the rate of profit in the oligopolistic phase is generated by the increase of unproductive costs which lead to a fall of net profits, which is precisely what the capitalist invests.[16]

Criticisms of Gilman are well-known and generally acceptable; here we would like to add that, even if all of his calculations are accurate (which seems unlikely), they are inadequate to prove the thesis in question. Actually, when Marx talks about the fall of the rate of profit he refers (and explicitly says so) to surplus value and all of its components (industrial and commercial profit, interest, rent).[17] Thus, to show, as Gilman does, a fall in the rate of net profit only in the manufacturing sector is altogether inadequate since very often industrial profits are inversely related with interests and commercial profits.[18] At most, Gilman's questionable calculations could prove a different relation of strength among sectors of the bourgeoisie, but not a global fall of the rate of (net) profit.[19] Furthermore, Gilman's thesis does not show at all that in poor countries the level of net profit is, on the average, higher. In fact, even if we admit that in advanced countries the rate of unproductive costs has risen, it is without a doubt that in poor countries there are uneconomical factors (mediocre infrastructures, restricted markets, low labor productivity, inefficiency and corruption of the state-bureaucratic apparatus, etc.) such as not to render them relatively palatable as investment outlets. The international movement of capital is its verification.

---

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-281. Italics added.

15. Sweezy, *op.cit.*, Henry Denis holds very similar theses. According to these writers, the attainment of full employment and the growing trade-union strenght would favor wages, thus leading to a fall of the rate of profit. Full employment, however, is far from being realized and the relation between wages and productivity in a typical country such as the U.S. fully guarantees (in the long run) the rate of profit.

16. J. Gilman, *Il Saggio del Profitto* (Roma, 1961).

17. Karl Marx, *Il Capitale, op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 262.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 428 (for what regards interest); and p. 344ff (for what regards commercial profit).

19. On the other hand, Lenin himself (even if he is wrong in generalizing and absolutizing his conclusions) shows how the bank, and therefore interest, can prevail over profit, i.e., over industry. This situation today has become obsolete everywhere, with the possible exception of Japan where the bank still carries considerable weight.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Imperialism and the Equalization of the Rate of Profit

In Marx's scheme the law of the fall of the rate of profit is integrated with that of the equalization of the rate of profit. According to this last law, capital tends to shift from more advanced to less advanced sectors, thus bringing about a tendency to equalize the rate of profit and of accumulation.[20] This is the source of the dogma, still believed by many Marxists, of a unique rate of profit at a global level. Actually, today it is just about impossible to calculate with certainty, if it did exist, this average world rate of equilibrium sought by particular rates.[21] The phenomenon of fiscal evasions, the inadequacy and questionability of the data and of the statistics available render such an operation very problematic. There is, however, a socio-historical index that tells us, avoiding almost impossible calculations, that there is no unique average rate of profit, and such an index is the constant intensification during the last 60 years of the unevenness between rich and poor countries. In fact, if it is true that the capitalist system is unified[22] and has absorbed the earlier structures of the poor countries in the so-called Third World and that capital tends to go towards areas with higher profits, it follows that in these last 60 years rich countries have had an average rate of profit higher than that of poor ones so that there has been no equalization whatsoever. This is explained by the fact that the rate of productivity and of monopoly profits is higher than that of agriculture and of small and medium industrial enterprise which, as we know, prevail in backward countries.[23]

---

20. According to Marx, in the more advanced sectors a higher organic composition (in symbiosis with competition) brings about a fall of the rate of profit and, therefore, an emigration of capital to sectors with high labor intensity (and low organic composition).

21. This does not conflict with our acceptance of Gabriel Kolko's calculations. Actually, Kolko only points out that the stratification of income in the U.S. has not changed, without, however, attempting to quantitatively determine the volume of invested capital and the mathematical level of the rate of profit, which would require much more elaborate analyses likely to clash with the indicated obstacles.

22. On this, see Paul Baran, *Il Surplus Economico e la Teoria Marxista dello Sviluppo* (Milano, 1961); André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1967) and *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment* (New York, 1971); R. Stavenhagen, *Les Classes Sociales dans les Sociétés Agraires* (Paris, 1969); Samir Amin, *L'Accumulation a l'Échelle Mondiale* (Paris, 1970); and Cristian Palloix, *L'Economie Capitaliste Mondiale* (Paris, 1971).

23. Cf. Pierre Jalée, *Il Terzo Mondo in Cifre* (Milano, 1971). There are some countries (relatively few) in which the weight of industry is greater than that of agriculture even in the Third World. What is in question, however, is a very fragmented industry: thus, even in Peru, for instance, which has been an economically very dynamic country (with respect to average Third World countries) and which has sought a road partly autonomous from imperialism, only 500 enterprises have over 100 workers each. Cf. R. Punaruma-Letts, *Perou, Révolution Socialiste ou Caricature de Révolution?* (Paris, 1971) p. 28. Obviously, manufacturing establishments with high concentration are not lacking (especially in Latin America and in Southern Italy), but they are relatively few, they are dependent on metropolitan capital and, given the limitations of the local market and the backwardness of the surroundings, they do not trigger additional industrial activity and remain "cathedrals in the desert" (e.g., the oil industry in Sardinia). The only industries of a certain relevance and significantly concentrated in these countries are generally the extractive ones which, in some cases, condition the whole national economy (e.g. Venezuela). Yet, this sector is controlled by foreign capital and is greatly influenced by the metropolitan manufacturing industry (cf. Santi, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66). Furthermore, the development of just the extractive sector aggravates the dependence and the distorted character of these countries' economy—already distorted by the underdevelopment of argiculture and by local middle-sized manufacturing enterprises.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This phenomenon cannot be considered, as Sylos Labini mistakenly does (in the course of an otherwise extremely interesting analysis), only a major obstacle to the old equalizing tendencies.[24] Actually, it blocks them, thus organically determining rates of profit permanently differenciated and not equalizable.

In oligopolistic capitalism, the equalizing instruments are no longer the traditional (19th century) ones, but they are replaced by the formation of cartels and conglomerates—two methods which are, by nature, impractical for small and medium industry, and agriculture. Thus, the equalization can obtain only among rich sectors (and countries) able to create cartels (which, in order to function, already presuppose a high level of concentration) and conglomerates (which presuppose a high availability of capital). It is within this context of inequality that the phenomenon of unequal exchange is to be located, which is the result (and not the cause) of oligopolistic mechanisms of accumulation and whose unbalancing tendencies it intensifies.

If the preceeding is correct, then we can attempt to define imperialism as "the phase of the capitalist system dominated by oligopolies in which the unification of the productive system and of the world market is based on an unbalanced mechanism of accumulation and on organically different levels of profit-rates, which favor the areas or countries where oligopolies prevail at the expense of agricultural zones or of zones with a fragmented industrial activity, thus bringing about unequal exchange and an increasingly serious and unremediable contraposition between development and underdevelopment."[25]

The proposed definition shares with classical Marxist theories of imperialism (Lenin, Hilferding, Luxemburg, Bukharin) only the presupposition on the unity of the oligopolistic world market, in addition to a negative judgment of imperialism. The dynamism of the phenomenon is seen in an altogether different perspective—in the light of the most recent studies of underdevelopment.[26]

If it is correct to point out the limitations of Lenin's theory, it is also necessary to

---

24. P. Sylos Labini, *Oligopolio e Progresso Tecnico* (Torino, 1964), p. 143. Actually, the old equalizing tendencies no longer operate. There are new ones which are limited to the oligopolistic sectors or sectors able to easily become oligopolistic. Sylos Labini refers to some equalizing instruments at the advantage of agriculture, i.e., the diffusion of exotic cultivation and selling cooperatives. In reality, given the fragmentation of agricultural enterprises, selling cooperatives cannot counterbalance the power of monopolies which, because of their concentration, impose an unequal exchange nonetheless.

25. This structural tendency of the system cannot be counter-balanced at the subjective level by an economic policy. Thus, Gunner Myrdal's proposal according to which poor countries would have to unite in order to impose on rich countries an international economic democracy as the metropolitan working class did once, seems very questionable and altogether utopian (cf. his *I Paesi del Benessere e gli Altri*, Milano, 1962, p. 205ff.). At any rate, even in advanced countries, economic democracy—if only at the distributive level—is a myth. Furthermore, poor countries do not form a class, but are composed precisely from a class viewpoint: the weak and corrupted local bourgeoisie would have to mobilize, with a bold plan of reform, the masses under an anti-imperialist banner. Yet, these reforms would hit the very bourgeoisie, and to arouse the masses with the danger of socialism can be a dubious undertaking—hence, the well-known limitations of local bourgeoisies.

26. Even the previously cited works, however, are far from carrying out a full criticism of Leninism. Very often the new contents mix with formal acquiescence to the classics. Thus, even an author of the caliber of Amin, after having shown that the monopolies' rate of profit is organically higher than that of small or medium enterprises, claims that in backward countries the rate of profit continues to be higher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attempt to locate the historical causes of his errors. First of all, during the epoch in question (1910-16) the characteristics of the recently born system where not completely evident. Secondly, Lenin was under the influence of the historical development of his country (tsarist Russia) which precisely during the 1890-1917 period underwent a rapid economic growth—notwithstanding the fact that it was a backward country.

Actually, during the period in question the oligopolistic-imperialist system was still in a formative phase and its hold over poor countries was not as choking as after 1929, when its degree of unity and compactness increased considerably.

Furthermore, Russia was a country backward in a particular way since during the second part of the 19th century it was still a great political-military power with a considerable ability to contract with more advanced countries. Of course, such a situation could not have lasted long. But precisely because of this the tsarist state began, during the second half of the century, a policy of capitalist transformation of the economy which allowed the country to conserve its strength by providing it with a modern structural support. French economic aid, which was interested in developing the country for anti-German aims and which could not deal with the still powerful Russia in the same way as Indochina, did the rest. These peculiar elements of pre-revolutionary Russian history do not obtain in backward countries—especially after 1917. These countries (e.g., India, China, Brazil) were at the time already reduced to the level of colonies and semi-colonies, lacking their own autonomous contractual ability.[27] Furthermore, after the First World War, only one power (the U.S.) took over within the system as it was shown by the 1929 crisis, which was followed by the Second World War introducing, up to 1970, the unquestioned predominance—even political—of the U.S. Thus, the system attained an exceptional degree of compactness which entailed a definitely greater ability of conditioning in relation to poor countries.[28] Even today's major lacerations in the imperialist world are not comparable to those prior to 1914 when a dollar crisis such as the recent one would have resulted in a war.

---

27. It could be objected that in this fashion we privilege political violence (colonialization of some countries) over economic structure (a critique that people such as Luciano Cavalli develop against Marxism). Actually, violence obtains during the phase of genesis and development of capitalism (and imperialism) at the service of the economy. Thus, rich countries and their capitalist bourgeoisies conquer territories and impose on them a dependent and distorted capitalism in which the movement of capital favors the metropolis. Once imposed, the mechanism is self-perpetuating and violence appears once again against those forces (generally socialist) which seek to break it. Thus, violence takes on various functions, but always at the service of capital.

28. It could be pointed out that the extreneous position of the USSR and of other collective-bureaucratic East European countries with a good industrial development from the capitalist world system opens spaces for political maneuver for poor countries with dependent capitalism. Efforts in this direction have not been lacking (e.g. Nehru), but they run into very precise limits. Actually: a) Soviet aids even to socialist countries such as Cuba are not disinterested (cf. M. Gutelman in *Il Nuovo Marxismo Latino-Americano*, Milano, 1970, pp. 78ff.); b) Soviet production is of very low quality (see Antonio Carlo, "La Natura Socio-Economica dell'USSR," in *Giovane Critica*, n. 26, p. 43ff.) so that very often the "aids" are useless rejects; c) the low articulation of Soviet production leads to the production of very few things necessary to poor countries. As Allende put it: "Chile is not self-sufficient, it needs to buy machines, engines, petroleum, spare parts, raw materials. Someone will say: buy them from the socialist world. We can't, they don't produce them." (Quoted by André Gunder Frank in *Manifesto*, March 29, 1972, p. 2).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All of this makes very unlikely the possibility of an autonomous development of poor countries within the context of the imperialist system: the experience of tsarist Russia definitely belongs in the past.

Capitalism and Imperialism

In an earlier work I have defined capitalism as follows: "That particular antagonistic mode of production based on broadened reproduction for surplus-value (profit) which operates through the anarchic competition of a number of autonomous productive unities (capital)." Since then I have found no need to change it even if immediately after the publication of my work a different definition has been proposed, according to which capital would be: a) a social relation; b) which reproduces itself; c) which presents itself as estranged from the laboring masses.[29]

It should be pointed out that the first two connotations are not at all specific: Feudalism and slavery are systems based on social relations which reproduce themselves, and this is valid for every mode of production. The third element of the definition is less vague, yet it is also inadequate since among various antagonistic systems there are similar aspects. There is exploitation in every one of them; the problem is the peculiar form that it assumes in specific societies. In East European countries there is great industry and the phenomenon of estrangement-exploitation of working masses, yet it exhibits specific characteristics irreducible to capitalism and an altogether different dynamic (what is missing is what characterizes capitalism, i.e., production for surplus-value).[30] Having clarified this point, we should indicate the relation between the conceptions of capitalism and imperialism proposed here. This relation seems to be one of continuity and specification in the sense that imperialism remains, as with the classics, a particular phase in the development of capital (the oligopolistic phase). This phase contains all the general elements of capitalism with an additional specific element: the new role of the law of the equalization of the rate of profit and, therefore, of accumulation.

This seems to be a rather new phenomenon in the sense that it can come about only with the domination of oligopolies. For the rest, imperialism develops tendencies already present in 19th century capitalism but which only now have become prevalent.[31] One need only think of the push for the constitution of

---

29. Paolo Gambazzi, "Le Forze Produttive e il Concetto di Capitale," in *Aut-Aut*, n. 123-124, pp. 84-85.

30. Without doubt, in some passages of the *Grundrisse* Marx seems to undervalue production for surplus-value as the specific aspect of capital. But in this work Marx has just discovered the concept of surplus-value and some of its implications still escape him: thus, productive labor is seen (in capitalist society) as value producing labor (cf. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Martin Nicolaus trans., London, 1973, p. 276ff.) while his well-known final thesis (which permeates throughout *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus-Value*) is that only the labor that creates surplus-value can be considered productive for capital. Thus, Marx rightly stresses the importance of surplus-value after the *Grundrisse*—the element which clarifies the specificity of capitalism, whereby the process of accumulation is the process of production of surplus-value which is transformed in capital. One more point: if the young Marx seems to indulge on the hypothesis of a system with only one capitalist (the State), this altogether disappears in his maturity where the system is seen as founded upon a plurality of capitals, since the disappearance of this element means the disappearance of the specific characteristics of capitalism.

31. For this, see N. I. Bukharin, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monopolies,[32] the market and a unified world productive system[33] within which came into being the division between industrial countries and agricultural countries (or producers of raw materials).[34]

A further point to be clarified is that the proposed definition of imperialism does not indulge in any easy "Third-World-ism" (*terzomondismo*) in the sense that development is not seen, from a classical viewpoint, as a monolithic unity contraposed to an also undifferentiated underdevelopment. The fundamental socio-political contradiction is not between poor and rich countries, since development and underdevelopment are two profoundly integrated faces of the capitalist system whose fundamental conflict (obtaining both in development as well as in underdevelopment) is that between capital and labor.

The So-called "Labor-Aristocracies" and "Integration"

At this point we must confront the problem of the so-called labor aristocracies and of the integration of the Western working class in the imperialist system.

By and large, there are three main theoretical trends concerning the theme of integration: a) the Leninist thesis according to which a part of monopoly super-profits would be distributed to Western workers, thus implicating them in the exploitation of backward countries;[35] b) the theory, which is a radicalization of the previous position, according to which the distribution of monopoly super-profits to Western workers would fully compensate them for their exploitation;[36] c) Marcuse's thesis, according to which in advanced countries surplus-value is produced by machines and not by workers so that there would be neither exploitation nor a proletariat.[37] The last of these positions is not based on any real analysis of the productive process, but only on one of Marx's prargraphs whose reading is (arbitrarily) interrupted half-way through. Read in full, the paragraph shows quite different conclusions.[38] On the other hand, Marcuse himself has considerably qualified this position.[39]

The other two versions, much more popular in the labor movement, also seem to be somewhat vague and questionable. In fact, the super-profits in question have amounted to about 12 billion dollars towards the middle 1960's,[40] while at the same time (1966) dependent labor income amounted in the U.S. to over 437 billion

---

32. This was already indicated by Marx and Engels. Cf. Karl Marx, *The Misery of Philosophy*, (Moscow, 1962).

33. Marx, *Grundrisse, op. cit.*

34. Marx, *Il Capitale, op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 496. Marx makes some references to unequal exchange in the *Grundrisse*. Yet, at the time he wrote this work (1857-58) the domination of oligopolies did not yet exist (at least in the present form). Thus, the phenomenon was to be related to other causes worthy of investigation.

35. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.

36. Cf. Victor Fay, "Les Classes Moyennes Salariées," in *En Partant du "Capital"* (Paris, 1968), p. 97f.

37. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964).

38. Cf. Galvano Della Volpe, *Critica dell'Ideologia Contemporanea*, (Roma, 1967) pp. 70ff.

39. Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of Marxism," in N. Lobkowicz ed., *Marx and the Western World* (South Bend, Ind., 1968). Here Marcuse re-elaborates the concepts of exploitation, profit, and labor productivity, and he tones down (although he does not abandon) the theses held in his earlier work.

40. Cf. Pierre Jalée, *Le Tiers Monde dans l'Economie Mondiale* (Paris, 1968), p. 111.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dollars. Even if this sum is reduced in half (since not all dependents are workers), and even if we add the total wages of all the other imperialist countries (which is a very high sum) it becomes clear, without having to come up with major calculations, that even by distributing all of the monopoly super-profits the workers' situation would not be significantly modified.[41]

Of course, Western wages are much higher than those in the so-called Third World, but this is a result of higher productive levels in these countries. It is also beyond doubt that the lack of development of poor countries is conditioned by the development of productivity of rich countries.[42] Yet, in the latter, the relation between wages and productivity is more favorable to capital and to the rate of profit than that of poor countries so that, in relative terms, workers are exploited more in developed countries than in, e.g., India or Brazil.[43]

What this means, in other words, is that capital proceeds on two tracks by impartially exploiting the working masses of poor countries as well as those of rich countries—from which it logically follows that revolution would also have to move on two tracks. A problem, however, remains, and it is that of the "integration" of the Western proletariat during the period between roughly 1923 (the failure of the last major German revolutionary attempt) and 1968 (the French May).[44]

If it is true that relatively high salaries (which must not be seen as a theft by metropolitan workers at the expense of those of colonial and neo-colonial countries) have had a not insignificant weight, it is also true that there are other factors not any less important. One of them seems to be particularly relevant: the policy of capitalist alliances. Marx pointed out that, with capitalist development, the middle classes tend to disappear. He was referring, however, to the old middle classes (artisans, free professionals, small retailers, independent farmers, etc.)[45] while, on the other hand, he also pointed out the impressive growth of the new middle classes (civil servants,

---

41. Here it almost seems that we underplay the exploitation of the Third World. Actually, 12 billion dollars per year (around the middle 1960's) was a lot for the unstable economics of poor countries characterized by under-accumulation. The figure grows considerably if it is compared not to wages (or to retributions to dependent labor) but to rich countries' investments (which, however, regard the capitalists and not the workers). Furthermore, backward countries perform an essential function in the imperialist mechanism (cf. Capecelatro and Carlo, *op. cit.*, p. 225ff.) which, however, relegates them to a subaltern role. Thus, they pay their subjugation in two ways, the one direct (loss of surplus) the other indirect (an international division of labor that blocks their development).

42. Since the advanced countries' wealth is organically tied, as we have indicated, to the division of labor between manufacturing countries and agricultural-extractive countries, a break in this equilibrium would have very serious repercussions for the advanced countries.

43. Cf. Charles Bettelheim, "Le Ineguaglianze Economiche tra Nazioni e la Solidarietà Internazionale," in *Monthly Review* (Italian Edition), 1970, n. 7, p. 9, n. 2. We do not believe that the phenomenon of workers holding stocks has any relevance. The thesis of democratic capitalism is a utopia (cf. Gabriel Kolko, *Ricchizza e Potere in America*, Torino, 1964, p. 77ff.) and small stock-holders, as even an apologist of capitalism such as Galbraith admits, end up only with the crumbs—as it is shown also by the fantastic growth of rates of self-financing (cf. Pierre Jalée, *Imperialisme en 1970,* Paris, 1969, p. 129), not to mention the high rate of hidden profits which does not reach the mass of small stock-holders.

44. Obviously, there are somewhat arbitrary dates: in 1936 events in France and Spain were very serious, and the same goes for the struggles in Belgium and Italy in the early 1960's. Furthermore, the post-1968 developments (e.g., France) are not without re-fluxes.

45. Cf. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, (Moscow, 1962) Vol. I.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

workers in the tertiary sector, etc.).[46] The phenomenon becomes intensified with imperialism[47] and in the U.S. today this tendency appears very clearly.[48]

At the same time, in order to understand capitalist policy with respect to these strata, we must consider the tables for U.S. income during the 1910-1959 period compiled by Gabriel Kolko which show that the lower tenth of the population has lost nothing, while the lower 30% moves from 13.8% to 8.6% of global income, and the fourth and fifth tenths remain just about stationary, while there is a not insignificant increase for the tenths from the fifth to the second place.[49]

Now, if we take into account that during the same period real wages grow about 230% and productivity 270.7% [50] it becomes understandable how the working class has suffered a relative impoverishment and that it has been the social force which has paid for the relative impoverishment of the lower 50% of the American population—an impoverishment which has been to the advantage of those tenths belonging from the fifth to the second place, i.e., primarily the new middle classes. Thanks to the growing productivity of labor, therefore, capital not only defends its portion of income, but practices a policy of alliance which gives it a mass base and isolates the proletariat. The "Third-World-ist" (*terzomondista*) scheme comes about in this fashion, but within the most advanced countries in the relation between proletariat and (new) middle class.

In addition, the development of automation violently poses the problem of unemployment.[51] In the U.S., which generates 40% of industrial capitalist production, the rate of unemployment is now over 5.5% and, since, their statistics are approximated defectively, we can assume that the real rate is around 7-8%. Thus, the proletariat finds itself closed in a vise made up of the middle classes and the ambiguous and restless sub-proletariat, available also for reactionary adventures—as the Fascist experience shows.

This does not mean that labor struggles are totally closed or lost: precisely during the French May the proletariat has shown that it can assemble around itself, in a situation of offensive, a very large consensus from non-workers groups. But this consensus can be reversed, and this is precisely the fundamental problem of an anti-capitalist strategy.

If this is correct, it follows that in the future certain Marxist analyses must spend less time with "labor aristocracies" and with the so-called treason of embourgeoisified workers, and more time with the mechanisms with which the proletariat has been

46. Marx, *Il Capitale, op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 491ff. Cf. also Karl Marx, *Storia delle Teorie Economiche* (Torino, 1965) Vol. II, p. 634.

47. Cf. Rudolf Hilferding, *op. cit.*, p. 459ff. Even Lenin, in passing, points out the decrease in the productive population. (Cf. *Imperialism, op. cit.*, p. 181.)

48. In this context, it should be noted that between 1847 and 1964 the number of workers in the U.S. declines slightly in absolute numbers, while during the period 1957-63, of 4.3 million new jobs, 2.8 million are (directly or indirectly) created by the state-bureaucratic sector. Cf. Henry Magdoff, "Problemi del Capitalismo Americano," in *Critica Marxista*, n. 1, 1966., p. 27.

49. Gabriel Kolko, *op. cit.*, p. 30ff. The higher tenth has undergone only a small apparent change, as Kolko himself shows.

50. Paul Baran, "Riflessioni sul sottoconsumo," in *Done va il Capitalismo?* (Milano, 1962), p. 127. The tendency becomes intensified in recent years: thus, during the 1953-1967 period, real wages grow by 29% and productivity by 58%. Cf. Barrat Brown, "Il Marxismo e lo Sviluppo Economico," in *Sviluppo Economico e Rivoluzione* (Bari, 1969), p. 34.

51. Frederick Pollock, *Automation* (Torino, 1970).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

isolated and neutralized (something quite different from integration) at the social and political level.

In this regard, considerable space should be given to analyses of the ties between oligopolies and the form of political organization of the consensus developed in advanced countries with imperialism, i.e., the great bureaucratic mass parties directed by a separate group of political specialists with a "popular" and pluralist program. The aim of the analysis should be to connect economic progress (the development of oligopolies) and social progress (proliferation of new middle classes and of the subproletariat, isolation of the proletariat), to political progress (the diffusion of bureaucratic social-democratic, communist and "popular" mass parties).

In Memory of Serge Mallet

by Dick Howard

The work of Serge Mallet—brutally interrupted as it was entering a new phase—was not well-known in the United States. Many of us knew the name, associated with the label "new working class," which he coined. Few had read his work, and fewer knew the man and the movement behind it. His sudden death in a car accident stops the work and makes it into a theoretical *corpus*. The turning point in his work is May 1968. Untypical of the Parisian politico-intellectual, Mallet was a fish-in-the-water: he lived May '68 from the inside, not simply as a member of the Political Bureau of the PSU.[1] May seemed to him at once the confirmation of the tendencies discovered and analyzed in his work, and the impetus to a new stage of struggle and of theory. The abstract notion of workers' control began to take on a concrete form; the question of the party-union relation was posed in a practical form; new strata entered the struggle, and new modes of political relations developed. The post-May period has been in large part marked by a recrudescence of class struggle, sparked now by the unskilled and immigrant laborers. While this might seem to contradict the "new working class" analysis, for Mallet—a political militant far more than an abstract theorist—it in fact shows a different strategy of the same capitalism which, in its period of forced modernization under DeGaulle, created the "new working class" and structured it as a political vanguard. The contradiction is not between two theories, but rather in the different responses of one, self-contradictory, system to the class struggle. For Mallet, as for Marx, the point is not simply to understand it but to change it.

1. The PSU (Parti Socialiste Unifie) played a central role in May 68—some would say a recuperative or cooptive one—in that, once the movement had begun, it was this relatively small, ultra-left party which most consistantly pushed the themes of self-management, workers' control and the like. And, at the time, its ranks included Pierre Mendes-France (who, along with a Trotskyist wing, a pro-Chinese group, etc., have since left the party)—the only conceivable "Kerensky" in that situation. The role of the remnants of the PSU today (1974) is minimal; most likely the party will dissolve into Mitterand's revivified PS (Parti Socialiste).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mallet's sociological work is situated within the context of a reorientation in France during the 1950's which recognized that, under the influence of what it is not unfair to call the "Stalinist Metaphysics of the Working Class," the proletariat had been reified and theorized as a kind of philosophical Thing-In-Itself, fixed once and for all by the Doctrine. The real, living and struggling working class, had to be rediscovered. The "metaphysical" view, insisted Mallet, characterized not only the Communist Party, but also "left" groups such as the Trotskyists, for whom the class is monolithic, revolutionary in its heart of hearts, but duped by the bad leaders, and still constantly ready to recreate scenes from 1871, 1917, and the other Holy Days of the Revolutionary Calendar. Sociologists like Alain Touraine (in *L'evolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault*) and Georges Friedmann (in *Le travail en miettes*), along with their teams of co-workers, took it upon themselves to study the concrete changes introduced by the changing structures of capitalist industry. The work of these sociologists was, however, situated in an academic milieu, and read mainly by specialists. Moreover, the industrial sociology they founded concerned itself only secondarily with day-to-day political and tactical implications. In this sense, Mallet's writing is related to their but stands apart in a crucial sense: it is the reflection of a militant on his own experiences and those of the workers, and it stands rather with the work of two other militants, published at the same time: Pierre Belleville (*Une nouvelle classe ouvriere*), and Daniel Mothe (*Militant chez Revault*, and *Journal d'un ouvrier*).[2]

Discussing the relation of his work to the kind of studies done in the world of Anglo-American sociology, Mallet noted that a major difference concerns their respective attitudes towards change. French theory is profoundly influenced by French history. Its milieu is a history marked not simply by the Great Revolution of 1789, but by the continual threat of social upheaval which concretized itself not only in the years immediately following the Bourgeois Revolution (in a way that cannot be brushed aside, as we in the US do, for example, with Shay's Rebellion), but again and again, a priori fixed and functional. Any analysis—whether leftist, rightest, or 'neutral-academic'—must take into account the potential and immanence of social upheaval. This orientation towards openness and revolution is not ideological, the result—as some Americans have erroneously argued—of the strength of Marxist culture in France. It is rooted in the presence of French history in its present.

One can take the threat of change into account in several ways. Mallet's two poles of reference are Marxian theory, and his own empathetic understanding of the culture, desires and lived experience of French workers. Particularly this latter pole was crucial to his theoretical and political work. His Marxism became what Marx had always claimed for his theory, but which had been dissipated in the *Realpolitik* of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties: the theory *of* of the workers (not the instrumental knowledge "for" it); the theoretical expression of the situation, experience, evolution, hope and possibilities that each lives daily.

Mallet was born into a working class family in the Gironde, near Bordeaux. He

2. Cf., also the use that Marcuse makes of Mallet's work, for example in *One-Dimensional Man*. Mallet and Marcuse were in regular contact during Marcuse's year of teaching in Paris (before the publication of *One-Dimensional Man*), and therefore at various meetings, such as those of the *Praxis*-group. A debate between the two after the publication of *One-Dimensional Man* appears in *The New Working Class: A Socialist Perspective* (scheduled for eventual publication by Telos Press).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recalled with great pleasure his grandfather, a socialist militant who, as did skilled craftsmen of the time, made his "tour de France" and ended up working on the leather interiors at the automobile works in the Paris suburb of Puteaux. There, he was befriended by an older socialist, Paul Lafargue—the son-in-law of Karl Marx. Grandfather Mallet was among those who voted to adhere to the newly founded Third International, splitting with it only when the Party attempted to exercise control over the union in a heavy-handed way which went against the anarcho-syndicalist leanings of this skilled worker. Too young to be affected by the Popular Front of 1936, Mallet's first political experience came during the Occupation by the Nazi's. He belonged to a small group, some of whose members were caught distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. He was expelled from the high school, and joined the *maquis*, spending the rest of the war in the Resistance.

Mallet joined the Communist Party after the war, working as a journalist for its local paper in the Gironde before going to Paris to study cinema for a year, during which he made two documentary films on the working class. He was then hired full-time by the Party, and worked in the cultural affairs section of the CGT (the Communist-controlled trade union). It was there that his first quarrels with the Party occurred. He was struck, first of all, by the fact that the "culture" to which the Party wanted the workers to accede was "bourgeois culture," the theater, art and literature of the classics. Moreover, the mode of acquisition of culture had always to pass through Party channels. It began to appear to Mallet that perhaps the Party's relation to the mass of workers was not what the Theory said it should be. He was further marked by the fact that, as he travelled throughout the country, visiting factories in each locality, he would be greeted by the local Party or CGT representative, whose first words seemed always to be : "Comrade, you know that the situation here is particular..."

Before his doubts could grow to disagreements, Mallet was elected to the Executive Committee of the International Federation of Youth, and spent much of the next few years living and travelling in Eastern Europe. There, he got to know "socialism" from the inside, and found his doubts about the party-mass relation nourished by the passivity of the working class and the omnipresence of the Party. It was not the Purges—whose real grounds he strongly suspected, due to his sufficiently high position in the hierarchy; these he could accept within a logic not unlike that of Koestler's Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon*, admitting that those purged were certainly not Gestapo or CIA agents, but arguing that political mistakes in a situation of all-out Cold- or Class-War had to be punished. Nor was it Krushchev's "secret report," or the risings of 1956 in Poland and Hungary, that led him to leave the Party. Rather, it was those growing doubts about the Party's relation to its base, about the structure of the working class itself, in which each situation was said to be "particular" while the Theory claimed that the class was unified and homogenous, and the tactical decisions that followed from this. Mallet was led into a series of disagreements with the Party, which reacted by demoting him from his official positions (leaving him without a job as well). He remained a member of his local cell, continued to argue his positions, claiming support from developments within the (slightly) more liberal Italian Party. He even learned Italian in order to read Gramsci—who had not been translated into French: Mallet says that the Party publishing house had the rights since 1945, but published only a small, insignificant volume of selections. For this latter step, he was again accused of deviating!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was the inability of the Party to pose any coherent resistance and alternatives to the advent of DeGaulle's Fifth Republic that led Mallet to quit the Party and begin publishing the theories and strategic analyses that he had been developing from hand-to-mouth since his demotion, working on odd jobs, hitch-hiking to the different factories he was studying, supported somewhat by a small grant from Jean-Paul Sartre. The theory of the "new working class," and Mallet's political analyses of Gaullism (the latter contained especially in three lengthy articles, later published in the volume *Le Gallisme et la Gauche*), appeared at a time of despair on the Left. In this climate of uncertainty, Mallet suddenly became a star. His articles appeared in journal after journal, unleashing a debate and a renewal. In *L'Express*, the mass-circulation left-liberal (at the time!) French weekly, there was a regular two-page spread, featuring on the left an article by Mallet, and on the right a contribution by the Gaullist technocrat Albin Chalandon. This was also the time of the formation of the PSU, with which many of Mallet's theories came to be identified. The Chemical Union of the CFDT, and its leader Edmond Maire (presently head of the whole CFDT), were only the best known of the union and leaders who recognized themselves in the "new working class" theories of Mallet and his realistic analysis of Gaullism as representing a radical change in the face of the French capitalism: the victory of the technocrats of organized capitalism over the familial and colonial form which had held the balance of power in the Fourth Republic.

It was at the same time that Mallet began the research that led to the volume of essays, *Les paysans contre le passe*, a journalistic masterpiece of sociological and political insight into the problems, contradictions and future possibilities opening up to France's rapidly changing agricultural sector. Once again, Mallet attempted to identify the differentiations within a social formation which had been "philosophized" to death by the tradition, treated as monolithic and unchanging, shorn from the living evolution of the social dynamic. As with the "new working class," it is a question of showing, on the one hand, what the direction of neo-capitalism portends and the effects this will have at a human level of daily experience; and on the other hand, of pointing out the intuitive forms of struggle that have developed out of that situation and are signs of a future clash whose contradictions will not be so easily resolved. In the case of the French peasantry, the contradictions are not simply local or regional; nor are they specific to France's individualistic and archaic agricultural forms. Their roots, rather, like in the contradictions engendered by France's entry as a nation into the world of organized capitalist competition in its modern phase, and the specific problems that this engenders on a structural level between—in a formula—the need to modernize in order to increase relative surplus-valus production through technological innovation, and the social possibilities that the new, larger scale, more mechanized, more productively efficient techniques engender on a social level. Mallet chronicles, for example, the "artichoke war" in which the peasants of Brittany learn not only the role of the middleman and the advantages of cooperation, but adopt new forms of struggle, new methods of disposing of their crops, new types of self-reliance. He shows the internal logic that drives small-scale cheese producers towards cooperative ventures, how livestock raisers discover the relation of their problems to those of society as a whole. The peasants begin to lose that proprietory individualism that made Marxists consider them a reactionary class—for now, objectively,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mechanization is necessary, bringing with it forms of cooperation, new attitudes towards one's neighbors, and one's form of life. Mallet's empathetic description of the lived contradictions and stammering attempts to resolve them is most striking in his ability to paint a portrait in which the subject recognizes the implications of its own action.

Mallet has been reproached for his impressionistic portraiture, and the "vogue" and journalistic nature of his work. In partial reply, he talked about two lessons that he learned in the *maquis*, both of which Mao Tse Tung had articulated years before on the basis of analogous experience. The first insight is that the peasantry is not a monolithic and eternally static class; its interests have to be understood in their dynamic specificity and historical context. This, of course, applies to all social classes. More important, he learned the "fish-in-the-water" lesson: that a vanguard which cuts itself off from the masses, by rhetorical excesses, terrorism or elitist theorizing, is doomed to failure. His experience as "cultural mentor" with the CGT also taught Mallet to pay attention to the capacity of the workers to manage their *own autonomy, to integrate new forms of struggle and social relations.* The theoretical translation of this experience is a dialectical theory as the reflexion of the implications of the already-present autonomous class activity in which the reader recognizes him- or herself as an actor whose actions have implications on an overall social plane, implications that may not have been apparent when the actions were undertaken. Thus, for example, Mallet spoke of peasant "Kolkhozes" in France—those collective farms that were ideological anathema to the traditional peasantry—and chrystallized a split in the peasant movement around these issues, leading Bernard Lambert, the peasant leader of the Loire-Atlantique, to bring his entire federation into the PSU.

Mallet is not a "heavy" theoretician. His citations from the classics are usually from memory, and his theoretical remarks are frustratingly vague. He described his method as "genetic structuralism," a term borrowed from his friend, the late Lucien Goldmann. Society is seen as a continual process of structuration and destructuration. Theory has to describe the combination and interaction of these structures within the horizon of a social totality. The structures are historical, dynamic and changing; a stress at one point calls for an intervention that only weakens another, letting loose new contradictions. This is almost common sense. Yet its implications are seen if we note that a non-genetic-structuralist politics would be one which, in an *opportunist* fashion, attacks a single hot-point, trying to make political capital out of it without recognizing that if there is, say, a housing problem this is because of the structure of the banking sector, construction industry, as well as the urban politics of the society, etc. It is not possible to strike at only one hot-point; if one doesn't see the interconnections, a mass, articulated socialist movement can never be developed. But at the same time, one's structuralism must avoid the dangers of an a-historical approach which, perhaps citing the sacred texts of *Capital*, sees the structural contradictions as fixed once and for all. In fact, there is a continual dance, a de- and re-structuration which must be taken into account. The genetic structuralist approach, then, will not provide eternal Theory, Truth with a capital "T." It is for this reason that, when pushed, Mallet would admit that, for example, one cannot say once and for all that this or that sector of the working class constitutes the "new working class," or that such-and-such a sector performs necessary productive labor where another doesn't. The shifts which take place due to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

historical change and the play of contradictions within the capitalist society call for continual re-evaluation.

Theory and praxis are thus intimately related to one another in Mallet's work. That is, not simply are the theories formulated with an eye to their political utilization—it is not a question of a theory *for* praxis, one which tells the reader "See, here is the problem; here is how you should act to set it right." Rather, the theory is at once a theory *of* an already ongoing praxis; and as theory it intervenes in that praxis insofar as the participants understand their praxis in the theorization of it. Class consciousness, insists Mallet, is not something that every worker "has," in the same way that one "has" a job, wage rate, car, television, etc. Class consciousness comes out of political struggle; it is the articulation of the implications of that struggle. It has a negative and a positive pre-condition: recognition of the impossibility of continuing to function in a system that is based on expropriation of surplus-value so as to continue to accumulate dead labor on the backs of the living; and, on the other hand, the self-understanding of the working class that it can run the society without the aid of bureaucrats, managers and capitalists.

There is a tendency to accuse those who hold to a "new working class line" of being the new technocrats or aristocracy of labor. Although this was never Mallet's position, it is worth noting here the shift in his attitudes since May '68. Mallet insisted that the change was not in his theory—that it was never his view that the "new working class" *alone* would make the revolution in the name of and for the rest of the class—but rather that the structuration-destructuration process in France demanded a theoretical reformulation. During the mid-1960's, i.e., after the formulation of the notion of the "new working class," Gaullist policy consciously aimed at coopting the energy that these strata had revealed at the beginning of the Fifth Republic. Indeed, it succeeded to some degree in this—only to see the developments of May '68 throw its politics into question from another vantage point, and recreate the conditions for new working class action. Nonetheless, since 1970, Gaullism again tried to use new mechanisms such as union participation and no-strike "progressive contracts" to integrate this stratum. The result, however, is a disequilibrium elsewhere, manifested now in the more traditional sectors of the working population, as well as in the radicalization of the struggles of immigrant labor. The "new working class" is thus—for the time being—no longer in the vanguard. The development of the struggle is presently moving through the incorporation of its demands for control, now at the level of the traditional working class as well. The task of the theorist becomes the thematization of the implicit dialectic which underlies these developments and the articulation of self-management type demands which are beginning to emerge.

Mallet insisted that his genetic-structural approach, stressing both the historical aspect of structural interaction and interrelation, and the fact that the structures are interwoven in a totality such that the attempt to correct a disbalance at one point only creates a problem elsewhere, permits him to account for the evolution that led to May '68, and to understand the forms that were taken by the student, peasant and worker struggles then and since. Immediately after May, he began a research project, studying the attitudes and reactions of the medical students, traditionally a passive and a-political (or rightest) bunch, who were drawn into the action of May at first by simple solidarity and by the need of medical personnel at the barricades. Once the barricade stage had passed and the occupations of the schools, with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accompanying series of strategic, programmatic and theoretical discussions, had begun, their involvement took the interesting form of a challenge to the medical profession in general, both as concerns the role of the physician, and as concerns the hospital, para-medical personnel, etc. Mallet's research found in their reaction a confirmation of the tendency to throw into question the bureaucratic forms of social control, which increasingly and in all sectors, reduces individual and collective autonomy, and calls forth a reaction in demands for social control.[3]

During May itself, Mallet was able to witness this process from within, having been actively involved in perhaps the most advanced experiment in workers' control during that period: the "Commune of Nantes."[4] There the workers, farmers and students effectively took control of the situation, arranging for farmers to provide food for the strikers in exchange for which the strikers put some of their factories to work, policing the city and preventing merchants from raising their prices, and generally setting up the embryonic forms of a workers' council government. Mallet's strategic perspective at the time, which was adopted but not carried through by the SPU, was to attempt to set up such situations of dual power wherever possible (including the use of force: e.g., Mallet was involved in the elaboration of a plan to seize control of a regional radio station—the plan, however, failed). The idea was to gnaw away at the legitimacy of the central power, establishing perhaps in the person of Pierre Mendes-France, a provisional government in order to grant the councils time to develop their self-understanding and confidence (remember: from February to October, 1917, was an eight-month gestation period!), and generally to move forward on the basis of mass self-management.

Mallet's theoretical and political position does not tend toward the looseness implied by the neologism—that is part of the problem, for in insisting on his rootedness in the Marxian analysis, Mallet often tends towards a kind of determinist reading of the genetically evolving structures. The argument for the existence of a "new working class" is posed in terms of Marx's discussion of the changing organic compositions of capital. But there is a crucial ambiguity, both in Marx and in Mallet. At times it appears as if it were capital, and its iron laws, which is the independent variable and working class behavior and consciousness which depend on it. In this sense, accusations of technocratism and even crude materialism which have been levelled against Mallet (and Marx) would make sense: the "new working class" would simply be the changed face of the servant of the machine, and would not be capable of making a socialism which implies the changing of the machine from master to servant. One would thereby be omitting from the fabric of the theory precisely that active element of praxis which makes it different from an empirical-descriptive analysis. At the same time, the objections to Mallet (and to

3. At least three major studies by Mallet are not yet published. One is written, but due to French libel laws which are structured in such a way as to make it difficult for political criticism to emerge, it has not found a publisher. The book concerns the financial scandals in the Gaullist regime concerning the building of a new commercial and diplomatic sector outside of Paris, called "La Defense." The second study was not completed in a publishable form. The third is an analysis of French working class struggles in the past few years, and was to be part of an European attempt to understand the present stage of struggles and the different forms it takes in different countries. Partial reports of the latter two can be obtained from the CORDES, 30 rue Las Cases, Paris 7e, France.

4. On this cf. Hannick Guin, *La Commune de Nantes* (Paris, 1969)—which incidentally does not mention Mallet's role.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marx), that his analyses are based only on a specific phase or structure of capitalist development which has now passed, would hit the nail on the head. Replying to such criticism (made, among others, by A. Touraine), Mallet insists that there is a grain of truth to this, inherent in the genetic-structural account, it is more important to see the other side and its implications. Mallet stressed the "fluidity" of his categories. Such fluidity can lead to the accusation of vagueness, as for instance when Mallet called the young unskilled workers (the *OS*) who have temporarily been the vanguard of struggle in France a "new category of workers," or indeed, when he is unwilling, or unable, to specify which social categories do and don't belong to the "new working class." Whatever the difficulties of such a position, Mallet would no doubt argue that this is not his vagueness, that the weakness is a strength, since the reality that he is attempting to theorize is itself fluid and criss-crossed with ambiguity, contradiction and struggle.

In the USA, one particular usage of the "new working class" notion stands out within the Left, where it was introduced as the radical counterpart to the soporifics of sociological pluralism with its status, stratification and psychological orientation which tends to make a blur of class theory, replacing it with a vague notion of "middle class" and then playing grantsmanship and publish-or-perish embroidery on statistical scales in what is literally a fugue. The usage I am referring to is that embodied in the "Port Authority Statement" of SDS, developed by Gilbert, Gottlieb and Tenny, and popularized by Greg Calvert during his term as national president of SDS. The notion was, unfortunately, put forward in a vague political context, without the sociological underpinnings that were really needed.[5] In the context (1966-67), SDS was in the throes of moving from a moralistic student movement to a conscious revolutionary organization. This basically student movement felt itself forced to justify itself in the eyes of a History it was only just learning about, and a Theory which only a few of its leaders knew. The question everyone was asking themselves was: who are we? If we are but students, and hence petty-bourgeois future-exploiters, how can we claim to be revolutionaries? The reply suggested was a variant of the "new working class" notion, arguing that the conditions of neo-capitalism brought with them a proletarianization of students and academics at the same time that the knowledge industry became an essential cog in the machine producing surplus-value. Unfortunately, events moved more rapidly than self-understanding, and the acceleration of the war against Vietnam coupled with the growth of a militant Third World Movement, pushed SDS towards a series of identifications with other "revolutionary" movements that ended in the disaster of the Weatherpeople, while many of those who did not take that route fell back on the old metaphysics of the working class—or fell out, period.

Very little of the research that has been done in the USA on the notion of the "new working class" bears any resemblance to Mallet's theorization. Partially because of its quantitative character, partially because of a lack of understanding of the interrelation of the Marxian categories within a dynamic understanding of the capitalist totality based on class struggle, and partially because it is abstracted from the immediate poltical considerations of a revolutionary change which is already

5. It is somewhat more developed in *A Disreputed History: The New Left and the New Capitalism*, by Greg Calvert and Carol Neiman (New York, 1971).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

implied in the daily practice of individuals—the category has been adulterated, and its usage vulgarized and/or treated as a straw man. It is true that Mallet's "genetic-structuralism" lends itself to the criticisms that the "hard" social scientists love to throw at it. It refuses to pin down the category, not just quantitatively but qualitatively as well, because it insists that the changing structures of capitalism which are its response to the class struggle can lead to the incorporation of different forms of labor into the productive mechanism while excluding others whose functioning formerly was central to the mechanism. Mallet's is a theory *of* praxis, based on actions and deriving its justification from the struggles in process. Mallet's arguments that May '68 was a "new working class" phenomenon, and his discussion of the strikes after May, are not empirically convincing in the abstract. That was never his goal. Mallet pounced on trends, tendencies, intuitions; and there is certainly an element of wishfulness in his choices. This was his vice, and his virtue.

The character of his work, infected by his life and that of the workers' struggle, makes Mallet's loss irreplacable. He was a singular, unique human being who combined in his theoretical and practice work the best of his class and its history. The class and its struggle will continue, in new and creative forms, as long as capitalist exploitation and domination continue. They will produce other theorists, each as unique and forceful, as independent in their practice and as dependent in their relation to the class as was Mallet. It is this interaction, so strongly imbedded in Mallet's person, which must be remembered: the worst monument for a revolutionary is one that preserves the form while losing the spirit. The friend, the conrade, the teacher is gone. Present still is the legacy: the legacy of the movement which he carried in his person, and the legacy of a forward-looking creativity never too old to learn.

*Toward a Politics of Signs: Reading Baudrillard**

by Jean-Claude Giradin

> "As for automobiles, they come to reflect and sum up the marvels of consumption. They mirror a society without history, except when they are burning."
>
> Jean Baudrillard
> *La Société de Consommation*

Signs

The difficulties involved in defining a sign non-linguistically are well-known. Signal, indication, icon, symbol, allegory, terms which border on similarity and dissimilarilty, compete to attain the fleeing reality of the sign, which seems to exist only to abolish itself in its relational function and forgets its materiality.[1]

* Originally published in *Les Temps Modernes*, December 1973, n. 329, pp. 1026-1043. English translation by David Pugh.

1. Cf. Roland Barthes, "Eléments de Sémiologie," in *Communication* n. 4.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whatever its basic nature, the sign is above all a mediating element, and, in the subject-sign-object triad, it is the sign that unifies the subject and object, while sanctioning their separation: the double function of mediation, the necessary intermediary, it destroys the problematic of intentionality in the strict sense. The multiplication of signs brings about the explosion of this elementary triad and allows the former to appear cutting across multiple networks which accomplishes a permanent task of absorption, the retention and retransmission of meaning and cummunication: intermundane space in the form of illusion of which the lack of being seems to be balanced by a surplus of meaning.

An analogy with words? Are signs the monemes of second languages? Let us look at Saussure: "*A science that studies the life signs within society* is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it *semiology* (from the Greek *semeion*, 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance."

Thus, in its origin, semiology acts under the authority of linguistics, the theoretical shield from which it is going to develop itself. The Saussurian theory of the sign frees the latter from its ambiguities and instability by dividing it into a Signifier and a Signified. A two-face reality, the sign monopolizes the signification, condensing into the signifier-signified relation from the periphery where the object (the thing in itself) and the subject act as referent and expressor (emitter). The signifying relation, which is thus sheltered in language, permits the signifying-mediators to correspond to the signified-concepts.

With Hjelmslev and the Danish school of linguistics, the Saussurian intuitions systematize themselves and affirm their structural dimension: the interdependence of a *plane of contents* and a *plane of expression* in which the respective subject matters are independent of their specific forms. At this level, the semiological signs begin to distinguish themselves from their linguistic homologues. One could pursue this in the direction of a clarification of their differences; however, if seems preferable to me to leave the question in suspension in order to take an "economic point of view" concerning the sign which will better introduce us to Baudrillard's problematic.

Saussure-Marx

In order to show "the autonomy and interdependence of the synchronic and diachronic" (*Course in General Linguistics*, p. 87), Saussure refers to political economy and economic history which, according to him, should be the only two "clearly separated" disciplines within economics.

In economics as well as in linguistics, one would be in the presence "of a system for equating things of different orders—labor and wages in one and a signified and signifier in the other" (p. 79). Which is to say, in order to explicate this proposition in Saussurian terms, there would be a relation of equivalence between wages, the monetary signifier of labor, and this same labor conceptualized as signified.

The comparison with economics, introduced almost casually by Saussure, must, however, be taken seriously because it permits us to approach the problem of value

2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Bally and Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York, 1959).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in linguistics (the process of meaning) in its relation to the problem of value in political economy (the process of exchange).

Against Saussure and with Marx, one can assert that the homologue wages-labor, signifer-signified, only transcribes the economics of bourgeois "reality." It reiterates at the level of language the confusion produced and maintained by the monetary formalization of labor-relations. The (Marxist) critique of political economy reveals the secret of this operation, namely: the hiding from view of the identifiable and quantifiable surplus-value as the qualitative difference between the value of labor and wages.

Once located, this surplus-value prohibits the reduction of the labor-relation to its formalized appearance and disrupts the linguistic principle of equivalence, which is formal in regard to political economy, in order to restore the reality of a *difference* hidden since the beginnings of linguistics. Consequently, the Saussurian notion of signification (an exact relation between the sound-image, the signifier, and the concept, the signified) is set aside by the appearance of this irreducible difference which shows the intromission of the labor-relation even in the depths of the sign. The signification thus defined is meant to close off this intromission, as if the real had to exhaust itself in verbal expressions.

In order to establish a structure of exchange in a scientific perspective, Saussure avoids mixing signification and value. Again, reasoning analogously with political economy, he asserts that value is always constituted by a paradoxical principle, according to which: a) a *dissimilar* thing can be *exchanged* for the thing whose value is to be determined; b) *similar* things can be compared with the thing of which the value is to be determined.

He writes: "In the same way a word can be exchanged for something dissimilar, an idea; besides, it can be compared with something of the same nature, another word. Its value is therefore not fixed so long as one simply states that it can be 'exchanged' for a given concept, i.e. that it has this or that signification: one must also compare it with similar values, with other words that stand in opposition to it. Its content is really fixed only by the concurrence of everything that exists outside it. Being part of a system, it is endowed not only with a signification but also and especially with a value, and this is something quite different" (p. 115).

Marx shows that, in its realization, value contributes to the generalized exchange of commodities in the market place in the name of a relation to equivalence worth keeping in mind. The first book of *Capital* contains a genesis of value forms. Marx tells us that, if dissimilar things can be exchanged, that is because as commodities, they have in common an exchange-value radically distinct from their respective use-values. At the most elementary level, the exchange between two commodities is the relation of two distinct and contradictory poles in which one commodity functions as a relative value with another commodity corresponding to its equivalence. With the expansion of exchange, a commodity becomes the "general equivalent" in which it measures itself against all others and the value finds its monetary form generalized. It should be noticed that, because commodities crystallize comparable amounts of acquired labor in the realm of production, exchange becomes organized through the mediation of money.[3]

3. The process of circulation of money M-C-M' generally translates itself through an accumulation of money ($M' \geq M$) as long as the circulation of products C-M-C' leaves the value of products C and C' unchanged.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In this manner, the circulation of money overlays the circulation of products and maintains a relation of generalized equivalence which, in these circumstances, masks a series of quantitative differences between monetary signifiers and signified commodities. The market ascribes a price to commodities which is related to their value as wages were to labor in the first example. In other words, the monetary signification of the relation of equivalence formalizes the exchange while hiding the price-value difference. (Price and value coincide only accidentally in the exchange process). Now the difference no longer obtains within a labor-relation but in things affected by a coefficient of "exchangeability," that is, commodities. From a qualitative one, the difference became a quantitative one.

Here we recognize the work of the sign in its economic dimension of general equivalent and necessary mediator of exchange. Through its function in commodity circulation, money is the only sign of a demiurgic logos which acts permanently in the disconnection between its signifiers and its signified: Capital's discourse feeding itself on the imbalance with its referential.

The sign is, therefore, at the heart of capital, i.e., at the heart of value in its infinitely variable autonomy. Does this capital-fetish exhaust the reality of the sign while summarizing it? Isn't there a sealed down presence of signs in the field of political economy which demands to be apprehended for itself, according to a suitable methodology, as if the signs that it focuses on refused their common reduction by the sign-fetish?

An affirmative answer to this question implies that a re-focusing of political economy is possible and necessary—a re-focusing whereby signs will penetrate, as if breaking into, the closed world of economics. Such an attempt, and one which Jean Baudrillard makes, will have to account for the permanent deviant and perverse effects that signs have on the body of political economy.[4]

Objects, Signs, Representations

Modern society reproduces the Platonic allegory of the cave by readapting the theatrical apparatus. As independent spectators of the sequences through which the world of commodities shamelessly displays itself, we are prisoners of the advertising medium which surrounds us with a language of metaphors and metonyms; a labyrinth of representation through which signs and objects speak to each other and speak to us while playing with our fantasies.

Plato's prisoners take the shadows projected on the wall of the cave for the reality of things; in order to gain access to the real, they must free themselves from their chains and turn around. A dialectic of de-alienation remains a possibility for the subjects "situated" between the object and its reflection. For modern serialized individuals the perspective is changed: they are bracketed within a multiplicity of images feeding on a self-contained compromise between objects and their signs. Inhabitants of a world designed from the outside, individuals have become the referents of a penal-like system whose iron bars have the transparency of chains of signifiers fraught with solicitude.

There is nothing more to gain by stepping beyond: it is the death of the subject, the end of transcendence. The world of representation is no longer even the passive

4. *Le Système des objets* (Paris, 1967). *La Société de consommation,* (Paris, 1970). *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris, 1970). *Le Miroir de la production* (Tournai, Belgium, 1973).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirror of our alienation. According to Baudrillard, it is a simple *showcase*: the formal and cynical censure *of our immanence in the order of signs.*[5]

Consumption

Subtitled "Its Myths, its Structures," *La société de consommation* is perhaps Baudrillard's best book. Ironically, it looks like the same type of object of consumption: a catchy object-sign that one expects to find in a drugstore (the temple of cultivated consumption). From a Planète edition re-edited by Denoël, this book has all the appearances of a disquieting seduction, not so much as a false culture as a culture reabsorbed in its sign, for sale like any other object.[6]

The Left does not like the notion of consumption. Imported from the United States in the early 1960's through the translations of Galbraith and Vance Packard, the critique of consumption itself is suspected of being the ideological cover of a Protestant guilt which remains otherwise faithful to the "ethics" of free enterprise.

With some exceptions, until recent years, "industrial society," "post-industrial society," etc. were dealt with almost entirely by bourgeois ideologists, while Marxists fell back upon the sociology of labor. Marxist sociologists who ventured into the critique of "modernity" were not convincing. Edgar Morin, in *l'Esprit du temps*, was the most ambiguous. As for Henri Lefebvre, his work on everyday life, through his effort to embrace the whole, often missed the specificity of problems and his notion of a "bureaucratic society of administered consumption" ends up by refuting itself.[7]

Dogmatism? The defense of orthodoxy? Does the Marxists' theoretical reticence regarding consumption actually hide a profound submission to the order of production or even a political-ideological submission to capitalism under the cloak of faithfulness to Marx? They seem unable to grasp consumption and modernity in general as an original reading in political economy, subsumed under the latter yet radically different. They refuse to consider the invading appearance of a socialized "ego consummans," a genuine narcissistic intoxication which preserves "homo economicus" through its imagery.

---

5. Hereafter, most of the words and phrases in italics will be taken from Baudrillard just as they are, without mentioning the reference.

6. A 16 x 20.5 format, a cover with brocaded borders, the title in gilded letters, this volume adorns itself with a reddish-brown jacket on which a car exhibits itself . . . (objective fish-eye photography); a skyscraper is reflected on the hood and windshield (a wink at the secondary degree of mirroring) giving a foretaste of remarkable iconography; and, it is lined with alluring captions by the author which punctuate the text. In short, for about $7.50 people will want to have this book not for what it is, they will thumb through it without reading it, but rather to leave it sitting casually between the hi-fi set and the bottle of Chivas as an element of worship in the strategy of the surroundings. . .where a sign-mate will not delay in setting a trap.

7. In a pocket edition destined "for those who have not resigned themselves" (Editions du Cerf), André Granou writes in the first chapter of *Capitalisme et Mode de Vie*: "The conditions of existence of man has been dominated for some decades by the profusion (relative) of goods of consumption. From the refrigerator to offshoot dietary products, from toilet water to laundry soaps, from camping equipment to photography, from the television to the automobile. . ., everyday life unfolds in a space where objects tend to dictate men's actions and gestures and to govern the remains of their human relations. Products of human labor organized on the basis of the relations of production, structured by the existence of the production of surplus value, these objects and the conditions of existence in which they insert themselves are nothing but the exact reflection of this capitalist organization of production."

This last phrase is typical of the self-censure of the Marxist authors when it is a question of consumption: as soon as the problem is grasped, it is immediately discarded in a tautology.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perhaps because Baudrillard does not associate himself with the Marxist tradition, he recaptures the theoretical initiative and breaks with guilty ways (*problématique culpabilisée*) of dealing with the question. According to Baudrillard, consumption is not purely a matter for social ruling classes. Rather, it concerns first of all, those who apparently do not have the means of consumption and who do not have any real control over their lives.

The magic world of the excluded and its fetishistic economy corresponds to the autonomy of appropriation and usage of things by the bourgeois. To the disadvantaged, all that remains is the evidence through possession of the object and its appropriation as sign. In these conditions, to consume is to partake in a mythical thought which conjures up reality out of the signs of the real. The television audience, for example, experiences the appropriation of images as if they were inducements dispensed through a mythological solicitation by gods called Technology, Progress, Growth. The signs thus blend in a tentacular venture of supressing reality, of maximally excluding the world.

As such, consumption is not pure madness or intoxication. As social logic, it demands to be encircled within its ideological environs which gives itself credibility. Thus, democracy of the given is secured, satisfying the propensity of naive anthropology to seek the good life for all, while secularizing the egalitarian mythology of the ideals of '89. The good life, quantified through objects, formalizes an equality prior to the usage of things which forms an illusion out of the transparency of social relations.

The process of growth and the ideology which accompanies it, underlies the socialized practice of consumption while playing on its two imaginary extremes: scarcity and abundance. In this perspective, growth would maintain inequality only accidentally as it gives rise to some nuisances, the final goal remaining, pleasure for all. Little by little, we are discovering that this means nothing, and growth does not produce more equality than inequality. It is a function of inequality and it is decisive in the renewal of the social order, which, as structure, yields growth.

Thus, consumption is a class institution like schools. It can only ignore social contents and individuals in order to form them in its own logic. Its redistribution mechanisms are an integral part of the system, and the proliferation of new forms of assistance only feeds the fruitless task of social welfare. Baudrillard writes: "We accomplish nothing by deploring this loss to a renewed social politics; rather, we should declare that it fulfills its *real* function perfectly" (p. 68).

Initially, the logic of the society of consumption is *a process of classification and differentiation*; i.e., a logic inscribed in a hierarchy of social statutes which filters and selects groups from top to bottom. Exemplary groups rearrange differences through the permanent innovation of objects and distinctive behaviors. They set up an *order of difference* which produces behavior experienced by all consumers as free individual choices.

This logic of differentiation is not a simple assertion of prestige, but a positive and negative difference. It is both an indication and a denial of this prestige which assures the renewal of differentiation in other areas. Thus, if the power of a class is no longer seen through the external signs of an ostentatious style of sumptuous consumption, that is because the latter has been shifted (for example, towards culture, knowledge, life-style). What matters is that the difference continues. Thus, a succession of models is always regenerated which presents itself in series as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirroring their amorphous futures. Theories on the optimum rationale of needs cannot withstand this unlimited character of consumption which strains to scale down distinctive signs thus maintaining a tension of scarcity, a veritable institutionalization of *need* as productive force.[8]

Objects, Mass Media

As a systematic practice of separation, the recurring logic of differentiation pervades the social fabric and hides class contradictions by inculcating *the unconscious discipline of a code.* Consumption is a sign-code operating without appearing as it is. It is a *process of signification and communication* which, like a language, reorganizes the primary level of needs.

Through advertising and the mass media, the society of consumption constantly speaks to us in a disordered syntax, which nourishes a slyly totalitarian polysemic universe. However, consumption is not exhausted in language. With the desire to understand consumption using linguistic analogies, we risk imprisoning ourselves in an obliging discourse too close to the subject matter.

Baudrillard avoids this trap. By utilizing the "labor" of psychoanalysis which, in its written form, operates in a manner similar to the semiological approach, he avoids slipping into narrow visions of reality understood in terms of strictly signifying structures. In going beyond the manifest and familiar *contents* of consumption, Baudrillard attempts to show their *form.* That is, the compelling schema which re-articulate the real into *neo-reality,* mixing together the governing code and the latent contents of the communicated messages.

"The medium is the message." In *Le Système des objets,* Baudrillard provided the means to explicate and subvert the formula of MacLuhan through an intimate sociological investigation of the everyday. Refrigerators, furniture, cars, from the cult of antiques to gadgets, these objects prevent us from giving an account of the meanings amenable to the social structures which haunt them to the point of compromising their objective status. Functionality, atmosphere, the object defined by its function, its technological structure, leaves a place in communication relations which gives evidence of its substantial dispossession to the benefit of its autonomisation as sign: the reflection of our emancipation as consumers.

Modern man is no longer reflected in his objects; in the strict sense, he merely lays them out. He no longer has full, compelling relations with them: no expressive labor nor reciprocal dependence. The symbolic ritual has become formal liturgy. Objects inform us, suggest behavior to us and then they almost excuse themselves by their function, which they leave to us to sanctify as *ideas* through their form. In this modest world which hides its complexity beneath formal simplicity, *man no longer delegates the signs of his presence.*

8. "One is liable to miscalculate how much the actual establishment of systematic and organized consumption *in the twentieth century is the equivalent and extension of the grand dressage of the rural population in industrial labor which was fully manifest in the nineteenth century.* The same process of rationalization of the productive forces which had taken place during the nineteenth century in the *production* sector finds its culmination in the twentieth century in the *consumption* sector. The industrial system, having socialized the masses as forces of labor, had to go further in order to fulfill itself and socialize them (that is to say, to control them) as forces of consumption. Pre-war small investors or anarchical consumers, free to consume or not, have nothing left to do in this system. . . . Production and consumption—it is a matter of one and the same grand logical process of reproduction enlarging the forces of production and their control." *La Société de consommation,* p. 127.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The society of consumption is a system of signs overhanging a system of objects. The false transparency of the real reintroduces itself in a mirror-writing manner on human relations. Maternal and playful, permissive and guilt-free, this society attempts, through the generalized market exchange, to regulate social questions by the administration of things.

The media, from *France-Soir* to television, nourishes our complicity and everyday indignation which only furthers the process of reifying signs. Contrary to the Marxist sociologist H. M. Enzensberger,[9] Baudrillard asserts, in "Requiem pour les media," a chapter in *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, that television is a desperate *speech with response*. Television is a technical and cultural code which systematizes non-communication. It creates an illusive order regarding the desire to democratize because, this democratization can only reach the contents and not the form. "Shut off the TV and open your eyes!" The slogan of the March 1973 student demonstrations reminds us of the medium's function of social control. There is no "Leftist TV" and, like the schools, it is the form which must be subverted.

Political Economy of the Sign: Marxism

From *Le Système des objets* to *La Société de consummation*, Baudrillard analyzes this "semiological revolution." Through a symbolization of the object he shows how a law of sense and form—until recently the privilege of the ideological, the superstructural—has been conferred on objects. Henceforth, these connotations are intimately connected into the technological structures of production. They constitute a functional synthesis of objects which complete classical economy.

The Bauhaus[10] inaugurated the reign of functionality. This internal revolution in political economy announced the beginning of a generalized political economy of the sign. From now on, to separate the political economy of the sign from the field of material production would cultivate pure mystification. Moreover, the questions posed to Marxist economic theory by this massive entry of signs can no longer be ignored.

Specifically, Baudrillard is not a sociologist of the object: focusing on the latter, he questions their ideology and, consequently, the material conditions of the production and reproduction of ideology in general. Objects, commodities, use-value exchange-value, are all seen in a new light. Hence, his critical study of the economy of the sign questions Marx's theory through a feed-back effect.

This approach can be contextualized in the following way. Metaphysically, Baudrillard starts from the Marxist periphery, searching to rejoin it through a patient conceptual analysis. Moreover, he seeks to transcend it and reach the fundamental conditions for a renewed critique of generalized political economy (Political Economy + Economy of Signs). We can gauge the difference in perspective by comparing Baudrillard and J.F. Lyotard. The latter, reared in a strong Marxist tradition, "drifts" towards a libidinal economy seeking to keep an eye on the circulation of desire prior to its metamorphosis into political economy. In both cases, the divergent readings of Freud (Lyotard's figurative unconscious, Baudrillard's symbolic order) search for the points of separation with the Marxist totality.

9. Cf. his article, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," in *New Left Review*, 1970.
10. Cf. "Design et Environnement," in *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Much of the subject matter in *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du sign*, "sign function and the logic of class," "ideological genesis of needs," "fetishism and ideology," "beyond use-value," explicates and theoretically elaborates themes which were still scattered and intuitive in the first two of Baudrillard's books.

In terms of classical economy, consumption is the final reconversion of exchange-value into use-value whereby the process of production assures itself of its reproduction. But the economics of the sign points elsewhere. Goblot, in *La Barrière et le Niveau*, and Veblen, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, have approached the notions of spending and consumption (waste) by the manifest destruction of wealth which is beyond exchange-value. These notions of sumptuous spending surprise habitual economic logic. The latter overlooks this in order to refer to a value of sign-exchange which participates directly in the system of power of the dominant classes.

Sign-exchange value is the privilege of those who hold the monopoly of the code. This veritable transubstantiation of economic exchange value is the key to a mode of production for social domination. The control of the signification process freezes all of society for the benefit of dominant classes. Baudrillard goes against the Marxist grain and shows that the appropriation of surplus value is not causally related to the forms of sumptuous spending. The secondary classes, created by an elective community, by hierarchy, etc..., return to a social principle of exchange which confronts the law of value and penetrates it as the economy of the sign. The fetishism of objects, ideology—a process which today is mediated by the mass media (*mass mediatisé*) reworks political economy: ideology is finally disconnected from its psychologizing alibis (alienation, the manipulation of consciousness) and this tolls the bell of a revolution seen in terms of the reappropriation of social wealth (economic and cultural).

We cannot appropriate a code for ourselves. We only have access to it and the task of a cultural revolution is to destroy it. Thus, the economy of the sign is to the sphere of economy as the state is to the political sphere: namely, the location and key of the subversion of the Economic and Political, which announces the end of Representation.

After a critical recovery of the problematic of needs and the derivations of use-value (sign-form, commodity-form), which we will not stress, Baudrillard reaches a series of correlations culminating in a homological relation which summarizes generalized political economy:

$$\frac{\text{Exchange-Value}}{\text{Use-Value}} = \frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{Signified}}$$

that is vertically: exchange-value (economic) is to use-value as the Signifier is to the Signified. Horizontally, it results in a logical affinity between exchange value and signifier on one side, and use-value and signified on the other. The problematic of the sign and that of the political economy of the sign find each other again and form a system in this structural homology. Marx and his epigones, Saussure and the Semiolinguists, are again face to face.

With the submission of use-value and the signified respectively to exchange-value and the signifier, is it not the case that this form is terminated with the commodity form which culminates in the OBJECT, the indistinct form (exchange-value/use-value). Use-value has its utilitarian innocence as it is subject to the global logic of equivalence hitherto reserved for exchange-value alone. In unmasking the halo of neutrality which surrounded use-value (particularly by the critique of the ideology of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needs), Baudrillard takes issue with the Marxist theory of value suspecting it of being a process of abstraction about which it will be necessary for us to return.[11]

On the linguistic side, we find again the problems posed by the sign: Saussure's "arbitrariness of the sign," with its dash separating the signifier from the signified while leaving the Referent outside of the sign. The displacement and ejection of this "arbitrariness" by Benveniste, in these circumstances, ejects just about the whole sign: the 'real' is actually this horizon which is always deferred or put off by semiology and linguistics.

Baudrillard expresses this reciprocal proposition which can be summarized as follows: "The *logic* of the commodity is at the heart of the sign, just as the *structure* of the sign is at the heart of the commodity." Thus, the action or interplay of the signifiers and of the exchange-value are respectively subjected to the sign-form and to the commodity-form. They obey *the common rule of a code, a total medium which governs all social exchange as a system of communication.*

The Code is thus an invisible architecture which permeates all social production and the texture of ideology which indiscriminately nourishes and subsumes a process of abstraction *in* exchange-value and *in* the semiological reduction. An abstraction of what? The reduction of what? This process indicates an "outside character" of generalized political economy—something fundamental always suppressed and censured by the system; an order which must be radically denied since it means the death of the system: for Baudrillard, this is the Symbolic order.

The Symbolic Order

For Baudrillard, the Symbolic order deserves a particular study which avoids some of the confusions surrounding this muddled term. According to him, we can move on to the theoretical level: the symbolic order is that notion inherited from anthropology and reworked (touched up) by psychoanalysis. Derived from Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Bataille, re-read while crossing Freud without the warrant of Lacan, the symbolic order is a theoretical matrix in which the fundamental elements are ambivalence, reciprocity, transgression. Symbolic exchange is *economic exchange* which escapes into Value as well as into Signs.[12]

This use of the symbolic order, therefore, has nothing ethereal about it. For Baudrillard, it functions like a theoretical and practical infrastructure out of the

11. Through a close reading of Saussure in the light of Marx, I established the following homology in the beginning of this text:

$$\frac{\text{Wage}}{\text{Labor}} - \frac{\text{Signified}}{\text{Signifier}}$$

This formulation is not a relation of structural implication and if it does not contradict the formulation by Baudrillard, but rather seems to complete it, we should notice that it appears on a different plane. Salary labor transcribes a practical relation, a human relation of production; exchange-value-use-value concerns an abstract relation, the "practico-inert," of the things among them.

12. The formulation indicated above, extended to the symbolic, becomes

$$\frac{\text{Exchange-value}}{\text{Use-value}} = \frac{\text{Signified}}{\text{Signifier}} \Big/ \text{Symbolic exchange}$$

The oblique dash sanctions the radical exclusion of the symbolic exchange from the field of Value.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

de-construction and transgression of political economy and semiolinguistics. Always present in the immediate background of his writings, the symbolic order is what allies itself to the unconscious without suppressing or abolishing itself there; this pole determined out of the exchange which indicates an absence, a lack...the subject's vacant place?[13]

Finally, there is no explicit reference to Sartre in Baudrillard's writings. Yet, *Le Système des objets* and his analyses of consumption are rewritten inside-out versions of *Critique de la raison dialectique*. While adhering to the studies of series and of practico-inert structures, with the aid of "related disciplines" (linguistics, phychoanalysis), Baudrillard does a turn-about. This is done to properly outline "constituent praxis" and avoid the trap of the Subject by somehow surrounding it with his notion of the symbolic order.

In *Le Miroir de la production*, always in connection with symbolic exchange, Baudrillard accidentally approaches the notion of scarcity. Contrary to Godelier and Marxist ethnologists who joyfully export the productivist mythologies, and thus the scarcity, of primitive societies, in order to save his symbolic exchange economy from the categories of Production, Baudrillard sends Necessity and Scarcity into the field of economic exchange. It is here that the reference to Sartre becomes meaningful to appreciate the political impact of Baudrillard's writings.

For Sartre, scarcity is both "milieu" and anthropological structure. If founds the possibility of a history without being the origin or the cause of it and leaves open the past and future possibilities of societies without History. To the author of *La Critique de la raison dialectique*, scarcity is neither internal nor external to political economy: the latter is only the codification, the Science of scarcity.

The Sartrian discourse is ourside of political economy; the notions of "marginal groups," the radical negations which structure the dialectic of groups, in short the class struggle, has meaning only through scarcity. The discourse is political from the very beginning, but it is misdirected at each step by the humanist religion of the universal.

By denying scarcity, Baudrillard preserves symbolic exchange, but he thus fails to reach a political discourse relating to praxis.[14] He remains within the domain of political economy and through the mediation of the symbolic exchange-economy, he can only turn to the mirror of production in order to destroy it.

The mole-like work of the author of *Le Miroir de la Production* surfaces clumsily and in a bothersome way. Incisive and corrosive beyond measure, this last book is an amusing Leftist provocation against clerical philosophy. With such a book, one can no longer speak of a discourse but of a political act: it is the adoption of a radical stance. In tracking down the religion of productive forces, as demanded by historical materialism, he points to the enemy to be destroyed: the reproduction of capital which increasingly hides evil behind the folding-screen of Production.

---

13. On these fundamental questions regarding everything which has reference to the body, see *La société de consommation*; and, especially the article "Le corps ou le charnier de signes" in *Topique* (No. 9-10). Cf. also J.F. Lyotard: "Capitalisme énergumene" in *Critique*, November 1972.

14. Praxis is nothing outside of the conditions in which it constitutes itself, or rather it is only the abstract possibility always carried out and always carried into effect through a manifest retaking by individuals and subject-groups of a latent seriality. Here and now fleeing from history, it is a place signifying nullity and energetic decompression. The zero point, infinitely demultiplied, it is the infernal receptacle of Power and the Political.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REVIEWS:

Jean Daubier, *A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.* New York: Vintage Press, 1974.
Jean Esmein, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution.* New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1973.
Adrian Hsia, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1972.
K.S. Karol, *La deuxième révolution chinoise.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 1973.
Stuart Schram, ed., *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973.*

Of all the tumultuous events of the 1960's the Chinese Cultural Revolution was the most exotic and the most difficult to understand. As it followed its unpredictable course (from November 1965 to early 1968) it quickly called forth a legion of interpreters whose explanations were as varied as their information was spotty. To many of the hard nosed "realists" of the American academic, journalistic and governmental world (with their minds firmly wedded to the methods of Kremlinology and their ears firmly planted to the ground of Hong Kong) everything seemed reducible to a power struggle between rival leaders. What the Chinese said they were doing was irrelevant "ideology." What they were really doing was lining up to succeed an aging leader. On the Left, the Western followers of Chairman Mao put much more credence in the Chinese version of the Cultural Revolution, to the point of interpreting it as one of the great events in the history of mankind, a victory for socialism over forces which desired to subvert the Chinese dictatorship of the proletariat twoards the "capitalist road." In contrast, those who sided with Moscow on things political (and there were many) saw the Cultural Revolution as the latest, and most spectacular, manifestation of the "Left adventurism" of Chairman Mao and his followers. Leftists who paid their dues neither to Peking nor Moscow looked hopefully to the Cultural Revolution's mass mobilizations and decentralizing claims for clear evidence of anti-Stalinism on the part of Chinese Marxism. Even the occasional psychohistorican pushed his way into the act, seeing the aged leader, concerned with posterity in the last psychic stage of his life, seeking "revolutionary immortality."[1]

One common thread in almost all of these on-the-spot interpretations was an inability to place the Cultural Revolution in the context of concrete Chinese political and social history. In short, contemporary commentators—whether they believed the Cultural Revolution to be a cutthroat factional fight, a fundamental point of transition in world history, the flailings-about of a senile political lunatic, a great

---

* Thanks are due for the invaluable help of Charlotte Weissberg.

1. Perhaps the best of the American "realist" interpretation is to be found in Stanley Karnow, *Mao and China* (Viking Press, New York, 1972) and Edward Rice, *Mao's Way* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972). For the Western Maoists, William Hinton's *Turning Point in China* (Monthly Review, New York, 1972) is a good example, although more representative idolatry is to be found in the journals of the various Maoist sects of the time (Progressive Labor in the USA, *Union des Jeunesses Communistes-Marxiste-Leniniste* in France, etc.) For the Moscow line see any of the Soviet press or that of any Soviet aligned party, *Humanité* in France being one good source. Anti-Stalinist hopes were expressed mainly by ex-communist, non-Maoist activists in Europe, particularly in Italy and France (*Il Manifesto* and Lucio Magri, for example). For the psychohistorian's craft, see Robert J. Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality* (New York, 1968).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hope for workers' control, or the acting-out of a desperate old man—lacked perspective. Several years after the events, have we learned more? Much is to be gleaned from several new books about the Cultural Revolution, and by now the careful and cautious reader can piece things together into a reasonably coherent picture. Yet even in the "second generation" of Cultural Revolution commentaries considered here there still exists a tendency for writers to look for what they want to find in the events. In the absence of new information, however, this may be as good as we can do.

All of the books here reviewed are of foreign origin, three from France, one from Germany and one an anthology of the work of European scholars. For this reason alone they are all of interest, given the very different relationships which Europeans have had with China. An ideal treatment of the Cultural Revolution would combine exhaustive data on the events themselves, an intelligent placing of the Cultural Revolution in the broader context of Chinese history, an understanding of Marxism, plus, finally, enough political astuteness to avoid either Cold War cliché or mindless acceptance of the Chinese regime's own explanation of things. We will have to wait some time for such a treatment. At present it is hard to gather enough data, and even harder to judge the longer term implications of the happenings of the Cultural Revolution. For the moment, however, both Jean Esmein's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* and K.S. Karol's *La deuxième révolution chinoise* are quite helpful. Jean Esmein's book is perhaps the best detailed history of the Cultural Revolution yet to appear, marred only by insufficient consideration of the Cultural Revolution's historical antecedents. Esmein is a Leftist who uses Marxism as an intellectual guide, not as a dogma. He is sympathetic enough to the Chinese not to distort events, while detached enough to avoid the trap of simple re-transmission of official interpretations. And, finally, he was present in China through the Cultural Revolution as a French press attaché in Peking. K. S. Karol's *Deuxième révolution* is not an eyewitness account. But Karol has long been greeted by the Chinese as a "friend" (*à la* Edgar Snow) a status allowing him extensive travel opportunities in China (both before and after the Cultural Revolution), access to the Chinese leadership and rare investigatory priveleges. Karol's political preoccupations—Karol writes from within the European Marxist Left, is sympathetic to Leninism, but deeply critical of the anti-democratic nature of Stalinism, a stance which informs all of his writing—give his recreation of the happenings of the Cultural Revolution great interest. He is constantly searching for evidence about the degree and nature of Chinese departures from the Soviet model for building socialism, a concern which most of us share.[2] His search also leads him to attempt a reconstruction of Chinese communist history leading to the Cultural Revolution, another plus for the reader.

The remaining three books to be considered are less successful. Jean Daubier's *History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* is, like Esmein's book, the work of a Leftist Frenchman present in China during the events. Daubier's problem is that, as a French Maoist, he seems compelled to reconstruct the Cultural Revolution in ways which transform the official explanations of the Chinese into historical fact. Too often, in his work, what was probably trial and error and *ad hoc* adaptation by

2. Karol's earlier book on China, *China, the Other Communism* is worth consulting for these reasons, too. Ditto *Guerrillas in Power*, his perhaps overly pessimistic book on Cuba, which won him the ire of Fidel Castro himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

various actors, becomes either the farsighted genius of Mao or the sinister conspiracy of the "Chinese Kruschev," Liu Shao-Chi. There is much to be learned from Daubier's book, in particular about the official versions of the Cultural Revolution, but the reader should beware of Daubier's tendency to accept such explanations too uncritically. Adrian Hsia's *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (originally published in Germany, Hsia being a German-Chinese China specialist, now teaching in Canada) says next to nothing about the events to which his title refers. In defense of Hsia, however, the book does make a serious and intelligent attempt to explain the social contradictions which led up to, and underlay, the Cultural Revolution. His attempt, through the use of class analysis, is flawed only by a paucity of the hard sociological data needed to make such an argument convincingly. Finally, *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China*, edited by Stuart Schram and composed of a collection of papers by European China experts, is not explicitly about the Cultural Revolution at all. Written in 1972, it is rather an attempt to assess the changes actually brought about the Cultural Revolution. Although not uniformly helpful the book does contain some outstanding individual essays. Stuart Schram's long historical introduction on Mao and the origins of the Cultural Revolution is indispensible. Also several essays on the issues of economic development strategy underlying the Cultural Revolution are also very good (Jack Gray's article on "The Two Roads" is superb, for example).

What was the Cultural Revolution? On the simplest level, almost everyone agrees, it was a power struggle, one which eventuated in the purge of opponents of Mao Tse-Tung from leadership positions in the Chinese Communist Party. The error of many "China Watchers" is, of course, to stop here, assuming that power struggles in China are the same as they are in Washington or London, and that they are rarely concerned with issues of significance. In fact, the conflict between Maoists and those who came to be called the "capitalist roaders" involved basic issues of economic and political strategy concerning the shape of China in the near future. What was unique about this conflict was that it was not fought out behind the doors of closed rooms by elites. Instead it was accompanied by, and its results in large part accomplished by, a vast mobilization of major groups in Chinese society. And, as had been Chinese practice in the past, this mobilization was not only instrumental (i.e. solicited by leaders to achieve specific policy aims), but also educational, a vast school for the masses in motion. The issues at stake were communicated to, and discussed by, ordinary people in ways which made their implications explicit and open. In the Cultural Revolution, then, we are dealing with a subtle and unusual political process, a process worth delving into in much greater detail. What follows will be an attempt to situate the Cultural Revolution in a broader context plus a review of the turbulent events of the Cultural Revolution themselves, referring to the books where appropriate.

In time, the Cultural Revolution may well turn out to be a major turning point in both Chinese politics and the history of international socialism. What it was, in fact, was the emphatic rejection, first by Mao and his followers, then by all of China, of the Soviet model for the construction of socialism. As such, its roots lay deep in the history of the Chinese communist movement. These roots are worthy of brief review here. As both Stuart Schram and K. S. Karol ably point out, the Chinese rejection of the Soviet example involved the interconnected realms of political practice and economic development strategy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Politically, the Cultural Revolution was bot the triumph of Maoist "mass line" Leninism over Soviet-style elitist Leninism and the final Maoist refusal of Soviet hegemony over world socialism. The origins of these things lay in the early CCP realization of the need for a "Sinicization" of Marxism-Leninism. In an overwhelmingly peasant society whose major problems were agrarian and insoluble without drastic changes in property arrangements on the land, the Third International's stress on the primacy of the urban working class was quite inappropriate (especially after the CCP's urban organizations were destroyed by the Kuomintang in 1927). It made much more sense to organize peasant rebellion in China. The demands of peasant organization led to a focus on political work (the "Mass line") different from the rest of the Third International and, ultimately, to friction with the USSR. In the context of Civil War and Resistance to the Japanese, where the CCP had to win the peasantry to its side or be annihilated, the party developed tactics which took the real, day-to-day problems of peasants seriously. It was not sufficient for the party to change rural arrangements by decree. The peasantry had to be brought actively into the processes of change themselves. Only if the peasantry were educated to understand the broader social situation in which they lived, the roots of their problems and the appropriate directions in which to find answers, could the peasants be relied upon to support the CCP with enthusiasm. The top-down, push-button "organizational weapon" kinds of practices which flourished in urban-based communist parties at the same moment would have been counter-productive in China. The peasants had to know that the CCP brought real change for them and they had to be mobilized into active participation in the process of change (i.e. socialized out of their ages-old pattern of submission to gentry authority) in order to provide the kind of base the CCP needed. What emerged, to be consecrated fully in the "Yenan" period of the CCP's history (the early 1940's), was "mass line" Leninism.[3] "Mass line" Leninism did not abandon the concept of the communist party as vanguard. Rather it recast the relationship between the party-vanguard and the masses. With a peasant base, the party had to keep in constant touch with the real situation and attitudes of the peasantry. The best way to do this was to allow the peasantry itself sufficient latitude to communicate its feelings to the party. The cost of "top-down" party work in the exiguous context of Civil War and peasant mobilization would have been so great in terms of the loss of peasant allegiance that "mass line" politics also came to involve the encouragement of a degree of real peasant criticism of the party itself.[4]

"Mass line" politics was still Leninist, then, involving a vanguard party and democratic centralism. But because of problems specific to the Chinese situation, the CCP was obliged to promote a vastly greater degree of party responsiveness to the masses than existed elsewhere in the Third International. The Chinese party could simply not afford the emergence of any bureaucratic chasm between itself and the peasant masses. Thus Chinese "democratic centralism" took on a decidedly different allure from that existing in other places. Centralism remained the rule, to be sure, but a much greater degree of real and constant communication between the party-center and the masses came to exist in China. The Chinese party was much less

3. The best source on this period is Mark Selden's fine book, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Harvard University Press, 1972).

4. Here William Hinton's *Fan Shen* is, of course, the indispensable source.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afraid of the masses than others, much less prone to encapsulate the rank-and-file in a web of bureaucratic manipulation. The Chinese encouraged the peasant masses to express themselves and to act. In short, there came to exist unquestionably more "democracy" in Chinese democratic centralism because of "Mass line" politics than in other Marxist-Leninist movements.[5]

The Chinese party's propensity for "mass line" politics brought with it the danger of conflict with the Soviet Union. As both Schram and Karol note, such conflict was present, although muted, long before the explosion of 1960. Factional disputes in the '20's and '30's between Mao and others favoring a "Sinicization" of Marxism-Leninism and pro-Moscow groups favoring stress on urban workers and strict subordination to Moscow were heated. "Mass line" politics and a peasant organizing perspective won these disputes (although such differences in strategy between the CCP and the CP-USSR were not publicly stressed by either side). The CCP's 1949 success seemed, however, to mute such conflict. For a while after 1949 the CCP's behavior in power suggested that "mass line" politics and the CCP's rural focus had been simply tactics for winning power, as the CCP rushed to adopt the Soviet model—both politically and economically—for building socialism. Initial stress on a "big push," centrally-planned, heavy industry approach to socialism seemed to imply a return by the CCP to the orthodoxy of stress on urban workers and elitist Leninism. But by the mid-1950's a shift back to "mass line" Leninism and stress on rural questions was clear, consecrated in the Great Leap Forward (1958). With this shift came growing estrangement from the USSR. As Karol notes, Mao's response to the Kruschev revelations at the XXth CP-USSR Congress was unique. To Mao, the Russians seemed determined to escape from Stalinism by moving to the Right. The top-down elitist Leninism created by Stalin was a problem which Kruschev *et al.* decided to resolve by allowing the Soviet elite to install itself definitively as a "new class," regularizing its relationship of domination with the Soviet masses by "peaceful coexistence," material incentives and consumerism in the economic sphere—in short, by putting the masses to sleep. The Soviet example (perhaps Mao's own term, "revisionism," is of use) plus China's own experience with "mass line" politics led Mao, by the early 1960's, to resolve firmly on a unique

5. K. S. Karol's main literary quest is to uncover signs of real democracy emerging within Leninist situations, and he sees Chinese developments as quite promising in this light. While he is undoubtedly correct in seeing "mass line" politics as an important departure from Stalinist bureaucratization, the degree to which the Chinese situation is significantly more democratic is still an open, and, hopefully (some day!) researchable, question. The CCP remains a "vanguard party," as we have noted, and it continues to honor the principle of democratic centralism. This means that it continues to presume that the party, by virtue of its possession of proletarian ideology and the methods of Marxism-Leninism, will have a clearer and more correct idea than ordinary people of what direction the masses ought to take. Democratic centralism also assumes that, since there is only one working class, there can be only one working class way of understanding things. We do know that in China, at least at critical moments, the party has listened to the masses before deciding upon directions to be taken and ways of understanding things. We also know that the party has not been afraid to allow the masses a great deal of open expression and freedom to act, again in critical moments. The party claims also (and much evidence supports such claims) to be bringing the masses to the point where they themselves will be able to take fuller charge of their own lives, through education in self-determination (of which the Cultural Revolution is a good example). Ultimately, however, it would seem that such efforts at promoting real mass self-determination might come into conflict with centralism, an eventuality which the CCP is clearly not ready to foresee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Chinese road" to Socialism. Doctrinally, the "Chinese road" involved the strident assertion that class conflict continued long after the seizure of state power by communists (an assertion which implied that simple changes in property relationships did not automatically lead to fundamental changes in social life).[6] Karol may not be altogether correct in claiming that Mao resolved to "move away from Stalinism to the Left" as opposed to the "Right" path chosen by Kruschev (since it is unclear that Stalinism was ever an appropriate category for describing Chinese politics), but Mao's dedication to "mass line" politics in the early 1960's as a result both of Chinese experience and his analysis of the lamentable behavior of the Russian comrades was certainly one major source of the Cultural Revolution.

It would be unforgiveable to see the emerging primacy of "mass line" politics in China in isolation from the enormous task of economic development faced by the CCP beginning in 1949.[7] "Mass line" politics, even before 1949, was tied both to the need for peasant political mobilization in guerrilla warfare, and to the need to promote and expand production of all sorts in CCP controlled areas. After 1949, and especially beginning in the mid-1950's, the connections between "mass line" politics and a pathbreaking Maoist strategy for economic development became increasingly clear. The Soviet developmental approach, the initial recourse of the Chinese after 1949, had serious drawbacks for an economically backward, peasant society. Very broadly speaking, the problem was that the "big push," heavy industry accumulation model of the Soviets involved virtually ignoring (or worse, exploiting) the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population in the countryside in order to stress the building of modern urban industry. The assumptions of this model, that rapid urban modernization would ultimately "trickle down" to the countryside (or perhaps transport much of the countryside to the city to be modernized there) were open to all sorts of questions in the Chinese context. And the most basic Soviet presumption, that heavy industrial economic modernization on the basis of state ownership and central planning would automatically bring socialist social development in its wake was disproven by the 1950's to anyone, like the Chinese, who cared to look closely. More specifically, for China an urban industrialization which left the peasants more or less to themselves would ensure the consolidation and perpetuation of small-holding peasant backwardness which would undoubtedly prove an insuperable barrier to socialist change in the countryside later. Alternatively, a policy of dragooning the peasantry to supply a surplus for urban industrialization without providing the peasants with real betterment in exchange (as had occurred in the Soviet Union) would only ensure the rapid alienation of 85% of China from the communists. Finally, it was clear that the Soviet model brought with it all sorts of smaller evils in the urban sector itself, such as bureaucratic social relationships, new

---

6. It is not difficult to understand why this doctrine of "permanent revolution" suited the Chinese situation, given the class structure of China existent in 1949. With an overwhelming proportion of the population peasants, with significant *petit-bourgeois* interests, with much of the modern economic sector (small though it was) national or comprador capitalist, the idea that the simple transformation of property relationships would lead to basic social change was obviously absurd.

7. Treating politics as separable from economics tends, ironically enough, to be an error of which many Western Maoists (including Jean Daubier) are sometimes guilty. What seems to happen in such cases is confusion between the Maoist precept of the "primacy of politics" and the reduction of everything else to politics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and seemingly ineradicable claims of social privilege for party leaders, managers and technical specialists, elitist educational credentialing and institutions, and so on. These were unattractive in themselves, but in the Chinese context they might well reinforce the residues of traditional Chinese mandarin administrative habits, the traditional Chinese upper class scorn for manual labor and general anti-rural prejudice. And, to top it all off, the Soviet model, transplanted to China, might not even work to develop the Chinese economy.

In any case, the mid-1950's saw the emergence of a Maoist alternative to the Soviet model, based on "mass line" politics (here the reader would do well to look at several pieces in the Schram collection, in particular Schram's own essay, Jack Gray's superb paper on "The Two Roads" and Jon Sigurdson's work). The new model focussed on development in the countryside using rural community organization as the point of departure for modernization. Its components were the cooperativization of agriculture, basic literacy campaigns, the political education of the peasants and local, labor-intensive rural industry geared to the needs of agriculture. The object was to work the socialist transformation of the Chinese peasantry simultaneously with economic modernization. On the basis of increased agricultural efficiency, occurring in conjunction with the growth of agriculturally related local industry, markets for the products of more modern industry would come into being in the countryside, thus allowing for the natural growth of a larger, high technology modern sector. In short, economic growth would flow from the countryside, rather than the cities. Because of this and because of the "mass line" focus of rural community organization, rural/urban distortions might be avoided and a rural populace developed which would insist upon its right to self-determination and egalitarianism.

As a good many economists have come to understand, this "mass line" strategy for economic and political development is quite a sensible alternative to the European-derived models usually advocated for the modernization of peasant societies. Some of the problems which occurred in its early implementation in China were predictable, however. The first major installment of the new approach, the Great Leap Forward of 1958, was carried out with too much fervor and too little expertise, leading to considerable chaos. This, plus economic difficulties flowing from bad harvests in 1960-61 and the consequences of the abrupt withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1960 led to a major retreat away from the Great Leap's ideas. Beleaguered party officials, most of whom were accustomed to understanding things in ways derived from Soviet guidance, faced extremely difficult circumstances and, as a result, allowed petit-bourgeois tendencies among the peasantry to flourish, reinstalled strong material incentives to production everywhere and encouraged bureaucratic and a-political methods of control. Attempts were made to redress these tendencies in the Socialist Education Movement after 1962, but they apparently did not work well enough to suit Chairman Mao.

The Cultural Revolution, then, has to be seen as a supreme effort by Chairman Mao and his followers to force the final barriers to the full adoption by the CCP of the "mass line" politics and "mass line" economic development strategy outlined above. There is no doubt that these final barriers were formidable. While there probably was no real comprehensive alternative "road" to Mao's being proposed in the mid-1960's (the alleged existence of an explicit "capitalist road" faction owes more to Mao's desire to educate the public than to fact) there is evidence of considerable resistance to the implementation of Mao's "road," both in the CCP and among administrators.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To a great many *cadre*, faced with huge day-to-day problems as things stood, the task of carrying out a complicated and risky new line involving extensive further decentralization, rank-and-file mobilization and a de-emphasis on urban privilege and specialization must have seemed troublesome indeed. Bureaucratic procedures and the discouragement of struggle (of which there had already been a great deal, it must be remembered) must have seemed much easier. In addition to parts of the party an administration, the educational system and the intelligentsia also constituted barriers to Mao's "road." The upper levels of the Chinese educational system stood almost as an affront to "mass line politics." Here the worst sides of the Soviet model (which conferred positions of prestige and privilege on those with technical expertise) had been superimposed on institutions built to reproduce an American model of privilege (the leading Chinese universities had been funded by Americans) which, themselves, had been infused with Confucian notions of elitism. The only major institutional area of the society which did not present major problems to Chairman Mao was the Peoples' Liberation Army, which had been "rectified" quite satisfactorily by Lin Piao after 1959 (and which was to serve Mao well in the Cultural Revolution as a result of this rectification).

To Mao, a critical moment of choice seemed at hand in the mid-1960's. Although none of the barriers to the implementation of the Maoist "road" led directly to the "capitalist road" (Mao's way of referring to the Soviet model) the projected (and likely) continuation of bureaucratic trends in the party and an elitist educational system, made the possibility of future Chinese "revisionism" quite real. Mao's advancing age meant that only a limited period of time remained for him to throw his immense prestige fully behind the "mass line" option. And Mao's own relative loss of influence with the CCP apparatus (run with an increasingly firm hand by Liu Shiao Chi) in the early 1960's meant that action had to be taken soon.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began innocuously enough. (What follows is drawn largely from Esmein and Daubier; the reader in search of exhaustive detail should refer to both.) At the September-October 1965 meeting of the CCP Political Bureau, called formally to discuss Vietnam, Chairman Mao asked that disciplinary action be taken against certain figures in the cultural world, notably Wu Han, deputy mayor of Peking and the author of a current play, *Hai Jui Dismissed From Office*, which was a thinly disguised attack on Mao himself. The Chairman was denied satisfaction by the meeting. He then searched, vainly, for someone within the Peking North China cultural apparatus of the party to do a strong public criticism of Wu Han. After this search failed, he turned to South China and finally was able to prevail upon a Shanghai newspaper to do the desired critique. This appeared in November, 1965, the date which marks the real beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The early 1960's had made clear to Mao that important parts of the CCP apparatus had only a half-hearted interest in implementing the Maoist "road." The Wu Han episode clearly signified that Mao had lost the major part of his influence over the CCP's cultural apparatus, which, as Adrian Hsia's excellent chapter on "the intelligentsia" shows, had always been uneasy with Mao's strange notions of change. And Mao was unable to overlook the fact that the cultural apparatus and anti-Maoist intellectuals had strong support at very high levels in the party.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since Mao's prestige was immense and his influence within the party great, although diminishing, the party could not ignore his public critique of Wu Han. Things had not yet gone that far. The party responded by setting up a small "Cultural Revolution Group" to do something about the cultural problems unearthed by the Chairman. The key figure in this group was P'eng Chen, Mayor of Peking and a leading party figure. Under the guidance of P'eng Chen the group tried to sweep the affair under the rug (Wu Han was criticized, but aesthetically more than politically). Thus, for the first time a sequence of events occurred which was to characterize much of what was to happen later. Serious criticism, first by Mao, then by mobilized groups, was met by party *apparatchiks* with attempts to "manage" things without too much disruption, and very little change in policy. Such attempts invariably succeeded only in broadening criticism to those in the party responsible for efforts at "managing" things. In this initial instance, Mao refused to allow the Wu Han affair to be swept under the rug, for obvious reasons. For the Maoist road to succeed the cultural apparatus of the party had to be 100% behind it, not actively sabotaging it. Thus Mao decided to broaden his attack to include not only the cultural offenders themselves, but P'eng Chen and his allies as well. In early 1966, Mao made his dissatisfaction with P'eng Chen and the Peking Municipal Party Committee known in party circles, a move which was soon followed by a broad criticism of the Peking Press by the PLA papers (the first on many PLA interventions on Mao's side in the Cultural Revolution).[8] This maneuvering by Mao and his allies forced the party's Politburo to issue a strong statement in May 1966 threatening "representatives of the bourgeoisie" who had infiltrated the party. At the same time P'eng Chen was repudiated and demoted.

It is not clear what Mao's own intentions were at this early point in the Cultural Revolution (our authors disagree). He probably desired from the outset to alter the CCP's cultural policies and purge a few leading anti-Maoists from the upper ranks of the party, and thereby making the party more open to the "Maoist road." He may well have already decided that Liu Shao Chi had to go, too (Edgar Snow thinks that he did). But whether he originally intended the massive mobilization of students, workers and *cadre* which followed is open to serious question, despite the claims of Maoists (e.g. Daubier) that Mao had almost everything outlined in advance. Rather, the evidence suggests that Mao "played it by ear" from stage to stage of the events, being caught reasonably unaware by at least some of the vast explosions which followed his early actions.

---

8. As noted above, the PLA had already gone through its own "cultural revolution." The PLA had long been the scene of a battle between "Maoist roaders" in the military sphere (advocates of "mass line" military tactics involving realiance on "peoples' war" tactics, political education, egalitarianism and mass mobilization) and those advocating a modern high technology military operation, the "weapons firsters" who, after the Korean War, had introduced more conventional military procedures such as ranks, professionalism and specialization, into the army. By 1959, the Maoists had won this battle. The "weapons first" Minister of Defense, Marshall P'eng Te-huai, had become too brazen in his anti-Maoist criticisms and had been purged, to be replaced by the arch-Maoist Lin Piao in 1959. Lin began almost immediately to reverse trends towards a more orthodox army, reintroducing strong political education, abolishing ranks, and so on, such that the Army had become thoroughly Maoist by the mid-1960's. The interested reader would do well to look at Esmein's Chapter 3 for more information.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In any case, the events of the spring of 1966, although confined to the inner workings of the party and the press, clearly encouraged further action. What occurred next was, then, the expansion of the Cultural Revolution beyond inner party conflict to the realm of mass mobilization. On May 25, 1966, a Peking University philosophy instructor pasted the first "Big Character Poster" to the wall, thereby igniting a vast student rebellion. The rapid-fire expression of student discontent which followed cannot be explained solely in terms of organizational mobilization from above, although Chairman Mao's personal approval of the Peking University action on June 1 was undoubtedly very strong encouragement. As Adrian Hsia shows intelligently, Chinese students were tinder for a social movement at this point for reasons having to do with their own social situation as well (many early "big character posters" expressed grievances about university life—elitist and out-of-date teaching, absurd exam procedures, bureaucratic relationships with staff, elitist university recruitment, and so on). In addition, the most politically astute students fully understood the general function which the Chinese university had come to play as the producer of a new elite caste whose interests ran contrary to the tenets of "mass line" politics. More generally, Mao's blessing on the student revolt and "big character posters" meant that students should feel free to express their grievances. This had the effect of breaking the party's monopoly on political news making and opening up a vast public discussion in China.

The party apparatus responded to the student rebellion by sending out official "work teams" to rectify the university situation. As Jean Esmein's measured discussion points out, sending out work teams had become accepted party practice with the inception of the Socialist Education Movement (1962 and after). The function of these teams was to right the wrongs which were presumed to exist where the teams were sent, and this was what the new work teams proceeded to attempt in the universities. The problem was that they set about their task in a bureaucratic way, dealing with student rebels at arms-length, with the obvious intention of decreeing enough minor change in the educational system to undermine the student movement. The approach of the work teams, in other words, personified the anti-"mass line" tendencies of the party apparatus. Conflict, and the self-expression of the masses, were to be avoided in the interests of administrative expediency.[9] The by-now well-mobilized student rebels caught onto the work teams quite quickly and turned the focus of their protest against the work teams and their efforts to sweep away student protest. From this point on, the student rebellion was directed against those in the party responsible for sending the work teams in the first place, rather than against conditions specific to the university.

The next step was for student rebels to be organized into "Red Guards." Red Guard groups probably emerged spontaneously on a very small scale, but were quite quickly seen as useful for Mao's broader purposes. The Red Guards were to become quasi-official mass revolutionary student groups, encouraged by Mao himself, granted immunity from any reprisals by party decree, and aided by the benevolent

9. The work team question provides an interesting point of contrast between Daubier and Esmein. Daubier, the Maoist, sees the work teams as deliberately setting out to block the spread of the Cultural Revolution and failing. Esmein, whose version is probably more accurate, sees the work teams as party functionaries (proceeding in tried-and-true ways based on short-term expediency) who thoroughly misunderstood the new context in which they were operating and thus provoked, largely by accident, a massive student revolt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neutrality and organizational help of the PLA (intervening quietly on the side of Mao once again). That Mao had decided to promote student mobilization directly become clear when he posted his own "first big character poster" on August 5, 1966. Entitled "Let Us Bombard the Headquarters," it encouraged students to force the retreat of "some leading comrades adopting the reactionary stance of the bourgeoisie." The first massive Red Guard demonstration in Peking followed on August 18. Eight of these immense rallies, in which millions of Red Guards paraded in front of a rostrum to receive Mao's blessing and the exhortation of Lin Piao (it was estimated that over 10 million Red Guards in all took part in these demonstrations), were held in the next few months. These Peking happenings were the signal for a vast national campaign. Universities were closed, students were offered free transportation throughout China and, as a result, Red Guards swarmed all over the country. There was a general pattern to the movement. Peking students travelled to the provinces, primarily to provincial cities, to spread the word, while provincial Red Guards travelled to Peking in turn to be blessed by the presence of the Chairman.

By the autumn of 1966 the general outlines of the Cultural Revolution had become clearer. The Chairman wanted to purge certain top level party figures, those instrumental, with Liu Shao Chi, in setting up barriers to the full implementation of Mao's "mass line" strategy for change in China. The decline of Mao's influence within the party itself probably made it impossible for Mao to have worked such a purge by direct inner-party confrontation. In any case, it would have been uncharacteristic of Mao, and untrue to "mass line" politics, to have proceeded in this way. In contrast, the rich complexity of the Cultural Revolution, as it unfolded, was a consummate masterpiece of the "mass line" art. The educational system had become a factory for privilege and specialization, a major institution for producing "capitalist roaders." Rather than simply changing it by fiat, the route chosen was to mobilize students for change in struggle. The mass mobilization of students not only focussed national attention on the nature of the "capitalist road" and on "capitalist roaders" within schools and party, it also set up a vast action academy for teaching an entire student generation critical lessons about Mao's "mass line" strategy and barriers to its success. And this was not all. Once mobilized, once armed with an awareness of the "capitalist road" and those who promoted it, the students, become Red Guards, were charged with spreading the message to workers throughout Urban China (the Cultural Revolution touched rural areas only peripherally). What the Red Guards told the workers was, of course, that they, too, should mibilize where they worked and lived for their own struggles against "revisionism." Thus, not only was an entire successor generation of intellectuals taught to become "red," the entire urban proletariat was encouraged to learn and relearn the lessons of "mass line" politics.

The next step after the mobilization of workers (which was primarily directed at urban party machines, some of which were the backbone of Liuist power) was to begin "seizures of power." This meant that at all levels of urban settings—party committees, factory administrations, mass organizational leaderships, etc.—existing leaderships were to be supplanted by "revolutionary committees." This process was carried out in the months following February 1967. "Revolutionary Committees" were formed on the principle of the "Triple Alliance," of representatives of revolutionary groups (factory rebel groups, Red Guards, local groups), delegates of the PLA, and party cadre whose devotion to "mass line" politics and opposition to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the "capitalist road" was verified. These new "revolutionary committees" were to guarantee a thoroughgoing purge of "capitalist roaders" wherever they were, while at the same time forming the point of departure for the later reconstitution of the purged CCP. It was at this stage that the cult of Mao hit its high point—clearly Mao and Lin Piao understood the political utility of Mao's great personal popularity and had decided to exploit it to the hilt against party opponents. It was at this stage also that Liu Shao Chi came to personify the "capitalist road" and became "China's Kruschev" and "revisionist no. 1." The Mao cult was used to spread the Maoist "mass line" alternative while, simultaneously, the anti-Liu campaigns made explicit to all what constituted "revisionism." If Liu was, in fact, nowhere near being what these campaigns painted him to be, too bad for Liu. In any case, according to Maoist reasoning, Liu represented tendencies which, if projected into the near future, would lead to full-blown "revisionism."

If the political and educational returns of this mobilization of the totality of urban China were likely to be great, the risks of chaos and degeneration were also significant. Of course, Mao's ultimate safeguard against chaos and degeneration was the PLA, which could be counted on for support and a degree of calmness in any difficulty (here the reader would do well to refer to both Esmein's and Hsia's chapters on the army). Nonetheless, as the Cultural Revolution moved towards its conclusion, a certain amount of unforeseen disruption did occur. The worldwide tendency of student movements to decline into factionalism and sectarianism was not absent in China. Working class movements were not immune from factionalism either, and, in addition, showed a distinct propensity for "economism" (i.e. a trade unionist desire to see the fruits of their struggle in terms of the size of their wages). Since "economism" was distinctly anti-Maoist—it opened the way to material incentives—Maoist leaders and the PLA had the delicate job of keeping workers mobilized while not giving in unduly to "economist" demands. Inevitably, the Kaleidoscope of different and conflicting student and worker groups left doors wide open for all sorts of manipulation by *cadre*. Liuist elements were able to find some comfort in these developments.[10] Also extreme Leftist currents, which saw the Cultural Revolution as a campaign to get rid of the CCP altogether, rather than to purify it, were able to find support in certain areas, particularly from students. In short, excesses were committed. Serious clashes occurred, often with violence. Production levels declined.[11] The *results of such confusion were not salutory*. Faced with a plethora of groups claiming to have revolutionary purity, truth and Chairman Mao on their side, the masses tended to become bewildered, then ambivalent and,

10. Jean Daubier has an unfortunate tendency to *explain* student extremism and worker "economism" as a product of *cadre* manipulation. This is because the Maoist leadership itself explained deviations from the Maoist norm during the Cultural Revolution as the result of elite misleadership rather than as the sociologically understandable by-products of the social situations of the group in question.

11. Daubier's review of such events, despite his tendency to interpret them in ways which make the "capitalist roaders" responsible more than they were, is very good. The "Wuhan incident," in which rival groups engaged in a virtual civil war and local leaders attampted to imprison the delegates from Mao in Peking who arrived to straighten things out, was the most famous instance of conflict and violence. Troubles seemed endemic in Canton, which ultimately had to be occupied militarily. Student extremism in Peking led to the burning of the British legation, attempts to interfere in the processes of Chinese diplomacy and attacks on Chou en-Lai, whose inexhaustable efforts kept the machinery of state going through it all.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ultimately, demobilized. Moreover, Leftist extremism often caused excess timidity in ordinarily loyal party *cadre* at just those moments when their skills were most needed.

By autumn 1967 the time was ripe to begin shutting the Cultural Revolution down. PLA units were sent into factories to exercise a calming influence over working class factionalism. Working class elements, and later PLA groups, were sent to universities to dampen student extremism. Direct police action began to be taken against "counter-revolutionary" elements. Mao declared magisterially that there existed no need for divisions in the Left, a way of notifying those who persisted in factional activities that henceforth they would be considered anti-working class. Over the next few months a degree of calm returned (although not without the closing of certain universities) and, in essence, victory for the Left in the Cultural Revolution was declared. By 1968 what remained was a continuing mass campaign against Liu Shao Chi (who had long since been removed from his posts, to be expelled from the party in the course of 1968) and a careful public reexamination of his writings (in particular of *How To Be a Good Communist*).

With the dying out of mass mobilization, focus shifted to reconstituting the purged party. New institutions for re-educating *cadre* (study groups in Mao's thought, May 7 *cadre* schools) were set up; the absolute number of active *cadre* in the country as a whole was considerably cut; and quantities of *cadre* returned to the countryside to reaquaint themselves with manual labor. The country's administrative structures were simplified drastically. Ultimately, the Cultural Revolution's "revolutionary committees" became the basis for nominating delegates to the CCP's Ninth Congress, held in April, 1969. Both the composition of the Congress, and that of the new Central Committee, demonstrated that much new blood had indeed been infused into the party by the Cultural Revolution although, as Hsia's figures on the Congress show, much of this blood came from the PLA. That only one third of the previous Central Committee was re-elected provided one clear indication of the extent to which the party had been purged by the Cultural Revolution.

Many readers will come away from histories of the Cultural Revolution (even excellent treatments such as Jean Esmein's and less satisfying, although politically interesting, versions like Jean Daubier's) with some sense of frustration. Most of the time the fault lies not with the books, however. The main problem is that the events of the Cultural Revolution are, in themselves, but chapters of a much longer story. Thus, to consider these events on their own would provide a misleading vision of closure. The happenings of the Cultural Revolution can (in the hands of talented historians such as Esmein and Karol) give an observer some sense of the main themes in this longer story plus a fascinating and rare insight into the actual practice of "mass line" politics in revolutionary China. How different from our home-grown politics is a system where, even if only periodically, ordinary people are trusted to mobilize themselves and speak their pieces, with one main object of political practice being the education of everyone to understand, criticize and actively control the leaders! But there is much more to be known. The beginning of the Cultural Revolution did not begin a process, just as the ending of the Cultural Revolution did not end a process. If we are to understand the drama of contemporary China we must, first of all, understand this.

Several essays in the Schram collection (in particular those by Marianne Bastid, Christopher Howe, Jon Sigurdson, Wilt Idema and John Gardner) plus the last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chapters in the Karol book give us some idea of the immediate institutional and political consequences of the Cultural Revolution. For example, as Gardner and Idema show (chapter 5 in Schram), major changes in educational practices have occurred. Universities in particular have been radically altered. Higher education has become more "practical," less esoteric, and tied much more closely to the kinds of productive labor needed for the Maoist developmental alternative. Students now gain entrance to university on the basis of recommendations from their local productive unit, not on the elitist criteria used before. This presumably guarantees that students will be people of proven devotion to "mass line" politics rather than people of a certain level of abstract "culture" and aptitude (principles of choice which lead earlier to a strong university recruitment bias in favor of the children of elite families). Graduates will be expected to return to the place which sent them to serve local needs with their newly acquired skills. Professors have lost their mandarin-like status and have been introduced to the realities of productive labor. There seems even to have developed the interesting notion in Chinese education that schooling is not something for the exclusive use of children and adolescents, rather that it ought to be a "lifetime" affair, with people moving into and out of educational settings at moments in their lives when further, new, or perhaps different training seems appropriate. The general educational objective in China since the Cultural Revolution has been to abolish the "three major differences"—town and country, worker and peasant, mental and manual labor. It is clear from what little is already known about recent educational changes in China that this objective is much more than rhetoric.

After a long, and apparently difficult, period, the party has been reconstituted, a degree of administrative rationality and predictability has been restored. The specialists in the Schram volume have little to offer about the extent to which the party and administration have been reconstructed on *different* grounds from those which existed prior to the Cultural Revolution, undoubtedly because less is known about this than about education. That serious attempts at economic and political "deconcentration" (the term is Marianne Bastid's, used in contrast with "decentralization") have occurred is undeniable. This means that, while general strategic directives have been set out at the Center, in line with the Chinese practice of democratic centralism, ever widening latitude is left to local and regional levels of party and administration for elaborating upon these directives and adapting them to local conditions. In such ways will local problem-solving techniques be developed and "mass line" procedures be furthered.

After the sudden opening up of Chinese events to outside observation during the Cultural Revolution, the incredible opacity of Chinese politics and social life has returned in the 1970's, so it is extremely difficult to know a great many important things about what has happened since the Cultural Revolution (as the essay by Andrew Watson on the family and social interaction in the Schram volume demonstrates—it tells us little or nothing that we did not already know about these things since the Cultural Revolution, despite the fact that doing so is its main reason for inclusion in the volume). One of the most interesting and unfathomable contemporary mysteries is, of course, *l'affaire* Lin Piao. As Karol judiciously notes, the official version of the affair—an attempted *coup* by Lin and his henchmen followed by a precipitate flight towards the Soviet Union in a plane which crashed—is suspect. With Karol, however, we are probably on the right track to believe that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the basic reason for the abrupt departure of Lin *et al.* from the scene was Lin's reluctance to accept the regularization of party rule after the Cultural Revolution subsided, and, as Karol suggests, his unwillingness to follow Mao's *Realpolitik* moves in foreign policy. Lin was, throughout the '60's, the arch-Maoist, the dedicated "mass liner," mobilizer and architect of the Mao cult as well as the leader most responsible for building up the PLA to its centrality in the Cultural Revolution. In all this there is enough to posit that Lin was probably something of a Leftist zealot. As such, he was indispensable to Mao in the struggle against Liu and party bureaucrats. But if Lin insisted on his Leftist zeal into the post-Cultural Revolution period of normalization and, in addition, resisted the reimposition of party hegemony over the PLA, he may well have become quite dispensable later on.

What was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution? It was a critical moment in a much broader historical process. The Maoist model for economic and social development—"mass line" politics plus an economic development strategy which saw progress coming first from the countryside rather than the city—originated in the "Yenan" period in CCP history and was further developed in the 1950's in opposition to the Soviet model which the Chinese inherited from the world communist movement. First steps in the actual implementation of this model—in the Great Leap forward—were somewhat overeager and inept, faced unforeseeable problems in the external environment, and met incomprehension and resistance from many within the CCP itself. The Cultural Revolution was carried out to break through the ideological and institutional barriers which stood in the way of (and may have threatened to stifle forever) the fuller implementation of the Maoist strategy. The successful conclusion of the Cultural Revolution did not mean, however, the complete triumph of Maoist strategy, only the removal of certain barriers to its pursuit at what must be a very early point in its implementation. This is why it makes little sense to see the Cultural Revolution as an event standing on its own. The Cultural Revolution was an episode, albeit a critically important episode, in an historical process the greater part of which still stretches before us today.

Mao's "mass line" agrarian-based development strategy is clearly one of the most significant social innovations of the modern era. To peasant societies it holds out the possibility of a radically different path of growth and a radically different, egalitarian and participatory, modernity. The pitfalls in its way are many, however. The bureaucratic and elitist tendencies against which the Cultural Revolution was directed will inevitably reappear, one very important reason why we should be very wary of seeing the Cultural Revolution as a definitive victory. To the degree that the "mass line" educational aspects of the Cultural Revolution were successful and the Chinese masses have been alerted to look for and protect such tendencies, controlling bureaucracy and elitism will be easier in the future. But we really know very little about how the Cultural Revolution changed the basic perspectives of the Chinese masses. As Mao has indicated, there may well be more campaigns of the Cultural Revolution type in the future. There are all sorts of ways in which the Chinese may fall short of their goals. They may succeed economically, for example, but fail politically. They may, with time, gravitate back towards the Soviet model. Building an egalitarian society in which the divisions of labor, status and privilege which we have come to regard as facts of nature do not exist, or, at the very least, are radically diminished, is an enterprise which is difficult to comprehend, let alone carry out.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the meantime, if we learned to understand the dynamics of the Cultural Revolution as part of a larger process, that of the implementation of Mao Tse-tung's "mass line" strategy for development, we will have acquired an immensely valuable tool for judging Chinese politics. The yardstick of the Maoist model will be applicable for measuring present and future events in China, especially those which will follow the departure of Chairman Mao from the scene. K. S. Karol's work has the very great virtue of reminding us that another yardstick must be applied as well. It should never be forgotten that the Chinese experience is a Leninist one. The vanguard party and democratic centralism emerged as strong as ever from the Cultural Revolution. Karol's approach is to measure all Leninist phenomena against Stalinist practices, searching for indications of real or incipient democracy. The Chinese experience here is not yet conclusive either. Chinese "mass line" Leninism is very different from the Stalinist practices of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The "mass line," with its stress on developing local initiative and control and its insistence that the political process must not only produce policy, but also raise the level of critical political understanding and action of the populace, may well lead to a new form of democratic society in China. But there exists always the problem of centralism inherent in Leninism. To what exent is Chinese anti-Stalinism democratic? And how? The answers to these questions are also embedded in an historical process which stretches far into the future.

George Ross

Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973. 392 plus xiii pp.

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, China scholars the world over were amazed and bewildered. Most of the general theories of Chinese politics were instantly scrapped. How was one to assess the willful destruction of the "historical arm of the proletariat" by its leader? These and numerous other questions plagued the China field (in no way inhibiting the virtual *tsunami* of writing on the GPCR), and as many explanations resulted as there were investigators. Frederic Wakeman, Jr. was one of those observers, and his book, *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought*, represents the most comprehensive explication of Mao to date.

History and Will is the first intelligent attempt by a Western scholar to regard Maoism seriously in philosophical language and to place it in its proper historical context. Wakeman gives us both an intellectual biography of Mao Tse-tung and a development of the philosophical origins of the major elements and categories of Mao's thought, Chinese as well as Western. Previous Mao studies have stressed particular strains—populist, Promethian, etc.—but none has taken such pains to trace all the routes suggested by primary biographical data (e.g., Edgar Snow's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Genesis of a Communist" in *Red Star Over China* and Li Jui's *Mao Tse-tung t'ung-chih ch'u-ch'i ko-ming huo-tung* [*The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*]). To be sure, Wakeman's book does not have a precise set of identifiable conclusions, although "one of the primary assertions of *History and Will* is that Mao Tse-tung's dialectic was not truly Marxian because Chinese metaphysical constructions did not possess the universal ontological categories of European rationalism" (p. xiii). Notwithstanding this important qualification, however, it is Wakeman's project to analyze the whole range of philosophical traditions accessible to Mao which may have influenced his concepts and visions of history and the will. The particular point of confluence is the Cultural Revolution, in which "history (bureaucratic routinization) and will (Mao's permanent revolution) conflicted so dramatically" (p. xiii).

The book is divided into five sections which are intended to be seen as reflections in a "hall of mirrors." Part One is a series of six "Montages," six thematic approaches to an understanding of the images central to Mao's mind. Wakeman argues that Mao, as "The Revolutionary Founder," had come to regard himself as the Chinese revolution incarnate; he had in fact identified himself and his own life with history itself, thus lending added passion to his attempt to keep the revolution permanent. Victory then became something Mao feared for the potential routinization it implied. Revolutionary spirit had to be continuously revitalized. Robert J. Lifton has dealt with this theme in psychohistorical terms (Mao's fear of death, fear of the collapse of the revolution, etc.) in his excellent if brief volume on the Cultural Revolution, *Revolutionary Immortality* (Vintage Books, 1968). Wakeman goes further and explores the idea of revolutionary founder *qua* dynastic founder as well. Within this framework, Confucian cyclical historiography tells us, briefly, that dynasties rise, flourish, reach a peak, gradually become decadent, often are invaded and cannot defend themselves, and eventually collapse; then history begins anew. Mao certainly read Ssu-ma Kuang's *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aiding Government*) and was well acquainted with the opening lines of the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*.[1] He cannot help but have internalized to a certain extent this traditional view, so pervasive in Chinese society, of the inevitable decline of each regime. The resultant fear coincides with the constant desire to make the revolution a continuous process. There can be no victory, for the struggle can never be allowed to end.

In fact it has always been struggle, class struggle if need be, which Mao has instructed the Chinese people never to forget. However, this is a class struggle that goes beyond the communist revolution, an eternal vigilance against the weed-like growth of enemies in the revolution's garden. Any form of turbulence (with correct class direction) has come to be regarded as coterminous with "revolution" in China. As Mao put it during the Cultural Revolution: "The immense complexity of Marxism can be summed up in one sentence: It is justifiable to rebel." The masses, with whom Mao has always identified directly, make revolutions; that Party structures and personnel are transitional and expendable has been amply demonstrated by the Cultural Revolution.

---

1. "Empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce." Lo Kuan-chung, *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, translated by C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, Charles E. Tuttoe Co., 1970.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Glowing as "The Red Sun"—an image derived from the anthem, "The East Is Red"—Mao is presented by Wakeman as the cosmic life-sustaining force. Wakeman then descends from the clouds and describes Mao Tse-tung as "The Dictator." Here he delineates Mao's idea that enemies in thought or politics must be handled as sick people and harshly cured ("reformed") of their illness. Diseases crop up well after the socialist transformation and, as they are class deviations, become antagonistic to the Maoist vision of society.

However, when looking at that same mirror from another angle, Mao is seen as Rousseau's "Great Legislator." Wakeman discusses here the implications of the idea of the "general will" in China. He also begins an analysis of the concept of nature in Chinese thought and in Mao's usage in particular. Nature was not for Mao what it had come to represent in the West. In the West nature was to be fought against, whereas for Mao it was to be fought with; for freedom is "the unfettering of man's nature-given capacities" (p. 47). In the traditional Chinese *Weltanschauung*, man and nature are a good deal more fused than they are in the West, and this unity is reflected repeatedly in Mao's poetic imagery. The comparison with Rousseau come to a halt, however, with the concept of the social contract, of which there is no tradition in the Chinese notion of Emperorship. Through an exploration of the ancient Chinese classics, and medieval and early modern texts, Wakeman traces the notion of sovereignty and the ruler's relation to heaven (*t'ien*) in contradistinction to the development of the concept of divine right in Europe which had influenced Rousseau.

In the section entitled "The Myth-Prince," Wakeman discusses various Marxist prototypical figures: Lukács' Lenin and Gramsci's myth-prince vis-à-vis Mao's version of the agent of change. An understanding of the laws of history is conceived by all to be the first step towards affecting it. Central to Marxism, Wakeman notes, is the idea that "knowledge is power. Once man *knows* correctly, once religion in unmasked, then he can begin to perform those acts which will finally bring social forces under the control of society. Praxis: prophecies fulfill themselves" (p. 65). Where Mao converges with Hegelian Marxism is in his desire to break down the laws of history in order to escape from the realm of necessity (the requisite rejection of the Confucian world view is pronounced). However, Mao must be distinguished from Lukács with respect to the role of nature in history. Lukács, as an Hegelian Marxist, emphasized "denaturalizing" the means of production so as to liberate men, whereas Mao linked natural and social spheres—"mass man being a force of nature as such" (p. 68).

Wakeman's final image is aptly entitled "The Image Seeker." In traditional Chinese conceptions of history (order, regularity, recurring cyclical patterns), man's capacity to leave his mark on history derives from his ability to judge its course. Such a capacity supplies the superior man with a knowledge of how and when to act. Also, as Neo-Confucian thought does not presuppose a creator of mankind, there is no model upon which the individual might base his self-definition; nor is there an Other with whom he may compete. Hence, there is "no call to tamper with nature." Unlike the Taoist concept, the Maoist worldview counsels men not to merge with nature but rather to take up her fierce challenge. In Chinese Communist and Maoist imagery, which is "much earthier and ideologically vaguer" (p. 87) than that of the West, the challenge of nature was to overcome such enemies as nature fielded ("voracious wolves, poisonous snakes, parasitic worms, and injurious vermin"). From

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

documents we have of the Cultural Revolution, we get an image of Mao as "helmsman," guiding the revolutionary storm, propelling the "locomotive of history."

With only a blank page as transition, Wakeman then addresses himself to the thought of K'ang Yu-wei and his most famous disciples, T'an Ssu-t'ung and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao. To Edgar Snow, Mao described Liang's journal *Hsin-min ts'ung-pao* (*New People Magazine*) as having exerted a strong influence on him and his whole generation. In order to appreciate more fully Liang's effect on Mao, Wakeman begins by elaborating the major currents in K'ang Yu-wei's philosophy. Without going into any depth let me just say that the major problem that scholars have run up against with K'ang Yu-wei lies in the contradiction between his utopianism, on the one hand, and his active politically gradualist, reformist, constitutional monarchist views on the other.

Wakeman rapidly delineates the history of the commentaries on the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*, reputed to have been written by Confucius himself) with particular emphasis on the Kung-yang explanation of the cosmic import of every written character and the significance of missing comments in Confucius' *Ch'un-ch'iu* were eschewed fifteen hundred years ago and only revived after modern philosophical and phonetic methods enabled scholars in the 17th and 18th centuries to prove the reigning commentaries (Old Text versions) to be forgeries. The Kung-yang commentary, a mass of metaphysical obscurities, allows the analyst the greatest leeway in understanding Confucius. Unfortunately, Wakeman does not mention George Kennedy's brilliant article (written some thirty years ago) which in eight pages debunks finally the supposition, which the Kung-yang commentary puts forth, that the *Ch'un-ch'iu* presents any kind of consistent ethical face. Kennedy shows that character usage reflects no overall scheme and that omissions are due most probably to a lack of information. The dullness of the *Ch'un-ch'iu* does not necessarily imply "esoteric meaning."[2] K'ang, who was the last great Confucian and perhaps the finest mind of late imperial China, nonetheless saw fit to incorporate the vision of a cosmic (divine) Confucius, significantly reflected through K'ang's understanding of the Kung-yang commentary, into his own tripartite historical scheme; the final resting place for society in K'ang's historicism was the "Great Peace" (*T'ai-p'ing*) as discussed in his most famous work, *Ta-t'ung shu* (*The Book of Universal Harmony*). Wakeman argues that, for Mao, K'ang provides no means (hence no fierce necessity, no teleology) to attaining the *ta-t'ung*. Herein lay for Mao Marxism's superiority to utopian socialism in general. K'ang's scheme relied on *kung* (commonality) and peacefulness, not struggle; the *ta-t'ung* was more of a wish than a scientific historical necessity.

The Confucian concept of *jen* (benevolence) was central to all of K'ang's visions of egalitarianism, and it informed all his political thinking. With *kung*, these two elements were the fundamental qualities necessary for the construction of the ideal society. K'ang's student, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao,[3] called, however, for destruction to

2. George Kennedy, "Interpretation of the *Chu'un-ch'iu*," *Journal of the Oriental Society*, LXII (1942), pp. 40-8.

3. There are three very good biographies in English of Liang Ch'i-ch'ao: Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*; Philip Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism*; and Chang Hao, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

precede construction—to sweep away the old before creating the new. Mao was well acquainted with this argument of Liang's. Edgar Snow records that Mao often re-read that issue of *Hsin-min ts'ung-pao* which dealt with the construction-destruction theme. It is the reflection of this dialectic, marked in Mao's own works, to which Wakeman next turns.

In late 1913, Mao begin to study philosophy with the neo-Kantian Yang Ch'ang-chi, whose daughter Mao was later to marry. They read various Chinese philosophers from Confucius to the famous T'an Ch'ing Hunanese, Wang Fu-chih, and the Hundred Days martyr, T'an Ssu-t'ung. Kant, Spencer, and Rousseau were among the Western philosophers studied. Yang also prepared his own highly critical edition of the *Analects* (*Lun-yü*). Wakeman argues here, as elsewhere in *History and Will*, for a de-emphasis of the novelty of all the ideas imported from afar. Even Kant had to be translated into a philosophic terminology understandable to the Chinese, and this necessarily meant the use of Chinese philosophical concepts often with connotations different from their Western counterparts.[4]

Yang Ch'ang-chi taught that, according to Confucius, the will was transcendant of one's own life. One must sacrifice, if need be, one's own interests for the group. Ideals, however, are never to be compromised. It is endurance and the process of action itself, rather than the successful attainment of one's desired goals, which determine "self-fulfillment." Wakeman cites as Yang's major influence on Mao the idea of the will as the foundation of the human personality; the will was "an immortal core that was fully realized when directed toward social improvement" (p. 163). Hence action determined by the desires for certain ideals demands the greatest realism in the assessment of necessary steps.

Yang also introduced Mao to perhaps the most famous intellectual journal of the period, *Hsin ch'ing-nien* (*New Youth*), which began publication in late 1915. Through *Hsin ch'ing-nien* Mao came into contact for the first time with the writings of Hu Shih and, more significantly, Ch'en Tu-hsiu (a co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party six years later). Ch'en wrote of the ferocity of the will as human emotion which had only slightly evolved from its bestial predecessor.[5] Admitting that he had fallen under the sway of neo-Kantianism, Mao apparently resolved the contradiction between animalistic will and humanistic goals with "Kant's dualism," which he learned second-hand from the translation of a work by Friedrich Paulsen (1846-1908), a late 19th century Neo-Kantian. From Paulsen Mao learned that the will need not be regarded as bestial, but rather as "free, rational, and universal" (p. 166). Man was not innately dualistic.

Wakeman is dissatisfied with an analysis which confines itself to the effects of neo-Kantianism on Mao, for "ideas have to be defined in context" (p. xii). As a result, he devotes a chapter to a systematic discussion of Kant himself which readers more in touch with his language are better equipped to judge than this reviewer. Suffice it to say that Mao himself has on several occasions pointed to the significance of Kant's ideas in the development of his own thought. In a talk with Ch'en Po-ta and K'ang Sheng in 1965, Mao remarked that, in this early period: "All I believed in

4. Benjamin Schwartz has dealt with this translation theme in his fascinating book, *In search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Harvard, 1964).

5. It should be noted that although Social Darwinism had only been introduced into China through Yen Fu's translations several years earlier, its popularity was already pronounced. See Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was Kant's dualism, particularly his idealism" (p. 182). But Kantianism was entirely pre-revolutionary in Mao's eyes.

Wakeman also provides a succinct and instructive history of the reactions of Fichte and Hegel to Kant's thought and of the neo-Kantian and scientific reactions to Hegelianism. He concludes with Friedrich Paulsen whose *System der Ethik* was translated into Chinese by Ts'ai Yüan-p'ei[6] as *Lun-li-hsüeh yüan-li*. According to Wakeman, Mao acquired, through Paulsen's notion of the will, a "rational justification" for esteeming the will more highly than the intellect. "Out of Paulsen came the notion that the self was will, strengthened by resisting rather than accepting nature" and "force was enhanced by its opposition; effort was determined by its challenge" (pp. 202-3).

Mao's first real training in socialist theory was coincidental with his job at the Peking University library under the direction of Li Ta-chao[7] (the other founder of the Chinese Communist Party) from September 1918 to February 1919. During this period and later when on a trip to Peking in early 1920, Mao came across such "socialist" works in translation as *The Communist Manifesto*, Kautsky's *Class Struggle*, and Kirkup's *History of Socialism*. Mao must have been influenced by these works, for, by the summer of 1920, he considered himself a Marxist. Wakeman argues that Mao gleaned from these books that socialism was not an abstraction but rather a developmental phenomenon replete with discord and contradiction. From both Kautsky and Kirkup, Mao learned that revolution was not an end in itself but just "as much transition as achievement" (p. 219). As for the *Manifesto*, even Kirkup, who was critical of the fatalist strain he perceived in Marx, was aware of Marx's " 'strong assertion of the revolutionary will.' " Wakeman concludes that "what Kirkup, Kautsky, and Marx really offered Mao Tse-tung was a new intellectual currency with which to conceive of human development in economic terms. Chiang K'ang-hu [China's first socialist] or Yang Ch'ang-chi's attacks on familism were thus placed in a universal context" of societal development (pp. 218-9).

From Marxism Mao came upon his prime mover in history, struggle, or in philosophy's language, "practice." For Mao knowledge is attained and its truth verified only through activity, as book learning is of no use unless it applies directly to practical reality. In order to reach desired ends, knowledge has to be brought into unity with the objective social reality; and Wakeman characterizes Mao's concept of practice as "more a guideline to action than traditional Marxist practice" (p. 230). As such, practice becomes more important than theory for Mao. And practice *is* struggle—be it with class enemies or with mountains. Mao sees struggle everywhere; even after the communist era begins. However, because of the scientistic and monistic aspects of the "dialectic" of Mao's concept of struggle, Wakeman believes Mao's "dialectic" to be quite unlike that of his German predecessors.

As the Western European model for "practice" proves insufficient for an understanding of Mao's idea of this concept, Wakeman turns to a study of the great Ming thinker, Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), and the "parallel tradition of practice." He first notes the similarity between Mao's idea of *chih-hsing t'ung-i* and

6. Ts'ai Yüan-p'ei was one of the most important figures of 20th century intellectual history, and as yet no scholarly biography has been devoted to his life and work in any Western language. The same is essentially true for Ch'en Tu-hsiu.

7. See Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, (Harvard, 1967).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wang's *chih-hsing ho-i*—they both mean "unity of knowledge and action." Wakeman then goes on to discuss Wang's confrontation with Chu Hsi (the great Sung Neo-Confucian philosopher, 1130-1200) and particularly with respect to their conceptions of the "sage" from their respective exegeses on the classical text, the *Ts-hsüeh* (*The Great Learning*). Wang's interpretation of *ch'in-min*, meaning "actively loving the people," lead him to the further belief that anyone could attain sagehood. This was in sharp contrast to Chu Hsi's earlier elitist model of the *chün-tzu* or sage. The concepts in the *Ta-hsüeh* of *ko-wu* (investigation of things) and *chih-chih* (extension of knowledge) were central in Wang's philosophy until he hit upon the idea of *liang-chih*, an expression derived from Mencius (literally meaning "original-good knowing" and more commonly translated as innate or intuitive knowledge). Wang, though, equated *liang-chih* with "heavenly principle," i.e. the ability to know the good or evil of an instance without, as Mencius put it, "the exercise of knowledge." *Liang-chih* is to be differentiated from sensory perception—"It is not pure reason or abstract schemata transcendent to the world of things. It *knows* on a higher plane than our senses know, but it only knows what our volition wills by judging the morality of concrete events" (p. 254). Wang thus defines *liang-chih* as, simultaneously, "the act of moral intuition and the principle of that intuition" (p. 255).

Wakeman shows that the attraction of Wang's philosophy for Mao lay in the former's monism, his fusion of mind and being. One knows nothing without action—one should "always be doing something" so as to blend mind and activity. For Wang, "true knowledge was fulfillment in action" (p. 257)—which sounds much like Mao's appeal for the completion of acts already begun, but rather dissimilar to Marxian praxis. Wang desired an overcoming of the dualism he perceived between activity and cognition (i.e., "action and inaction"). "His doctrine of the unity of knowing and doing....was designed to illuminate the existential path of sagehood rather than resolve ontological difficulties" (p. 271)—which distinguishes it again from Marx's praxis. For Wang Yang-ming one had to act in order to know; the goal of philosophy was the improvement of mankind, and knowledge was contingent on events. For Marx cognition preceded activity, while for Wang men had to alter things to know them and thus be liberated from abstract knowledge. One of Mao's peculiar feats was to unite these two traditions in his vision of the revolutionary consciousness in such a way that escaped the pitfalls of false consciousness.

Before coming to his philosophical denouement, Wakeman turns to one other strain potentially influential in Mao's development, that of Neo-Hegelianism and particularly T. H. Green and Thomas Bradley, with both of whom Mao became acquainted through Yang Ch'ang-chi. Briefly, Wakeman concludes that, from Green, Mao learned that "individual will must be adjusted to laws which rationally determine where self-satisfaction is to be sought; the state must assert its positive function" (p. 279).

Mao's central philosophical category has remained "contradiction," which is both his concept of the dialectic and the root of his concept of struggle. Without contradictions, Mao maintains, things would cease to exist, for being is nothing other than the movement of matter (*wu-chih yün-tung*). Yet Wakeman asserts that, unlike the *yin-yang* dichotomy beneath much of traditional Chinese philosophy, Mao's "unity of opposites" lacks the balanced opposition in the *Book of Changes* (*I-ching*); similarly, it is distinguishable from the concept of the dialectic in both

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marx and Lenin, as it lacks the Hegelian category of sublation (*Aufhebung*).Contradictions are sub-divided into antagonistic and non-antagonistic—the latter, Shlomo Avineri has pointed out, would have meant nothing to Marx.[8] For Mao, antagonistic and non-antagonistic can, due to circumstances, be transformed into one another. And it is in the Cultural Revolution (non-antagonistic to antagonistic) that Wakeman sees the highest, clearest unification of the essence of Mao's thought.

The Cultural Revolution, as Mao stated, was a battleground, a "civil war without guns," for the nascent threats to Mao's vision of the future. Fearful of new class distinctions and special class privileges for children of Party officials, fearful of the rise of bureaucratism, and fearful of a further estrangement from the masses, but aware of the vested interests of those entrenched in the Party, Mao saw the assault on the Party from below, combined with authority from above to be the only course of action. The cult of Mao, or his *persona*, which Wakeman distinguishes from his personal power, flourished in this period as the final resting place for truth. However, after the Cultural Revolution, "Mao ruled as his own *troika*: the person of Chairman Mao, the *persona* of Mao Tse-tung's thought, and the personification of his populist line—all of which together embodied the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 319). In fact, Wakeman contends that Ch'en Po-ta and Lin Piao, the two major leaders of the Cultural Revolution, fell subsequently because they associated themselves too closely with Mao's *persona*, which clashed with the mass line.

In the Cultural Revolution large numbers of men and women were struggling with evil deviations, as natural as weeds in Mao's communist garden. Because for Mao man lacks a divine rival, his vision of history was linked finally to man "fulfilling himself by completing nature" (p. 326). Men must know history, discover its turns, stages, developments, prepare for backsliding, but always be intent on struggling for ideals. This, of course, requires the greatest strength of will.

History and Will shows the distinct influence of Frederic Wakeman's teacher, the late Joseph R. Levenson, in its broadness of scope, universality of interests, and clarity of expression.[9] In his earlier work, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China: 1839-1861*, a study of local reactions to the Western arrival in the Canton area, Wakeman revealed his ability to write lucidly and scholarly within the confines of the monograph. However, with *History and Will*, he has broken out of the parochialism of 'Sinology;' the questions asked go beyond China's borders, if, indeed, their answers are largely found within those same boundaries.

Joshua Fogel

---

8. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, (Cambridge University, 1971), p. 175.

9. See, for instance, his *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 3 volumes, (University of California, 1968) and *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Stage and the Chinese Stages* (Univesity of California, 1971).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Trent Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination: The Origins and Development of Critical Theory*. New York: George Braziller, 1973. 282 pp.

A number of recent contributions to Marxist theory published in England have defined their problematic in terms of deriving from the Central European tradition inaugurated by such theorists as Lukács, Korsch, Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse in the second and third decades of this century, and subsequently renewed in the post-war years—principally in the work of Jürgen Habermas.[1] In contrast to the treatment of Marx as the spiritual father of Marxism-Leninism or as the chief ideologist of state-socialism or social democracy, their approach has been characterized as the "revival of a philosophical tradition which can be properly called Hegelian."[2] Around the leitmotif: "Philosophy, which once seemed to be overcome, remains alive because the moment of its actualization was missed,"[3] there developed a tradition in which a Hegelianized Marxism was combined with psychoanalytic theory in an effort to rethink the relevance of Marxism to a changed situation: to the failure of the proletarian revolution in advanced capitalist societies; to the failure of the Russian Revolution to produce a truly human society; above all, to "late" or "organized" capitalist society in which such central concepts as 'class,' 'base/superstructure,' 'productive/unproductive labor' proved increasingly difficult to apply, and in which science and technology had not only become increasingly important as factors of production but had taken on ideological functions.

The Critique of Domination stands in this tradition. But its author—sensitive to the repeated criticisms of the Frankfurt School for having allegedly "fallen behind" Marx into a kind of left-Hegelianism, unscientific utopianism, *Kulturkritik*—is concerned to make the round-trip from Marx to Hegel and back to Marx again. His aim is to sketch the "foundations for a critical theory that would retain its ties to classical philosophy but would have the role of effecting a more critically oriented type of social science theory and research" (p. 16). More particularly, he seeks a marriage between Hegel and cultural Marxism on the one hand, and the Marxist critique of political economy on the other. Taken separately, he argues, either approach is inadequate. Marx's political-economic critical theory of society lacks the necessary socio-cultural component. In late-capitalist society the objective dynamics of capitalist development do not, in themselves, produce the class struggle. Nor is the character of domination in it conceivable solely in terms of exploitation and alienation (p. 17). In his concern to distinguish the philosophical mode of critique undertaken by Hegel and the left-Hegelians from his own materialistically conceived form of critique, Marx polarized idealist and materialist forms of critique and facilitated the degeneration of Marxism into economistic and mechanistic ideologies.

On the other hand, twentieth-century cultural Marxism has failed to grasp the link between critique and emancipation. In focusing on the process of rationalization and the attendant manifestations of "instrumental," "technocratic" or "one-dimensional" rationality, the Frankfurt School succeeded in restoring the cultural

1. In addition to the growing number of translations of works by these authors, see Albrecht Wellmer: *Critical Theory of Society* (New York, 1971); George Lichtheim: *From Marx to Hegel* (New York, 1971); and Martin Jay: *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston, 1973).
2. Lichtheim, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
3. Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt, 1966), p. 13.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

component of a dialectical social theory, but was never able to regain its link to Marx's political-economic critique. Without this ralation to materialist critique, cultural Marxism has not been able to found a critical *science* of contemporary society.

These themes are by now quite familiar to readers of this journal. Schroyer develops them intelligently and with an admirable mastery of the relevant literature. In comparison to other works of this genre, his treatment offers the advantages of a brief, but suggestive historical survey of the category of alienation in pre-Marxian Western thought (ch. 1), a serious effort to interpret and integrate Marx's critique of political economy (as well as more recent work in this area) into his conception of a dialectical social theory (part III), and what is perhaps the best discussion of Habermas' work available in English (ch. 4). Schroyer acknowledges his debt to Habermas in the introduction (p. 37). He considers his work to be "the most significant advance in the creation of a critical theory since Marx" (p. 33), "a major innovation in the history of Marxist theory" (p. 137). In the end, however, he argues that Habermas has not transcended Marx's critical theory, but provided a necessary dialectical completion of it (p. 165).

This review will focus on Schroyer's attempt to construct the "missing link" between Marx's critique of political economy and his theory of revolution. It is this link which is to be supplied by the incorporation of the socio-cultural component which figures so prominently in cultural Marxism. And it is upon the claim to have—at least in outline and as a first, rough approximation—provided such a link that the degree of Schroyer's success must be judged.

The problem is stated in terms of a question that receives no unambiguous answer in Marx: "How is the recognition of domination possible? and how does this relate to the analysis of the accumulation of capital? How does Marx's *Capital* in fact relate the critique of political economy to possible class consciousness?" (pp. 92-3). If we are to avoid a "mechanical Marxism," the class struggle cannot be viewed as directly compelled by objective economic forces, but rather as "prepared" by it (p. 93). But recognition of the necessity for conceptualizing the consequences of the accumulation process within the totality of social institutions, i.e. of regarding them as mediated by human consciousness, raises the further question : 'Wherein lies the source of the need to struggle against domination?" (p. 93). This is connected with the issues of how Marx conceived the relationship of political revolution to social revolution. Although various alternative models can be found in his work, Marx returned in the end to a framework in which economic processes create objective possibilities for a political revolution which can be accomplished only by seizing central power. Schroyer argues that this indicates a "failure to appreciate fully the significance of social-cultural liberation," and "inability to recognize social-cultural claims for liberation as basic to revolutionary processes" (p. 96). He sees Lenin's vanguard theory and Marcuse's revolt of the instincts as typical, ad hoc attempts to provide a need for emancipatory struggle through the introduction of extra-social mechanisms (the party organization, inbuilt biological instincts). What is needed is a theory of the socio-psychological dynamics which Marxist theory underemphasizes, a "reconceptualization of the interrelated *needs* of human society and individual development" (p. 97).

Schroyer finds the clue to this reconceptualization in "Hegel's theory of the dialectical relatedness of 'mutual recognition' processes and the level of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self-consciousness. Hegel's dialectical theory shows that there is an objective need for social processes that enable man to achieve individuality. The distortion or rupture of open mutual-recognition sets up a dialectical reaction which is experienced as a pressure for emancipation from domination. Hegel's notion of 'spiritual causality' can be developed into a theory of emancipation from social-cultural domination" (p. 96-7). The key then to constructing the missing link between domination, critique and emancipation is the reconceptualization of the Hegelian notion of the causality of fate—"the compulsion to overcome suffering inherent in the causality of reciprocal symbolic communication" (p. 93)—freed, of course, from the idealist presuppositions of the philosophy of identity.

For his treatment of the causality of fate and, more generally, of the "dialectic of the moral life," Schroyer draws heavily on Habermas, in particular on his interpretations of Hegel, Marx and Freud in *Knowledge and Human Interests* and on his more recently developed theory of communicative competence.

Hegel's method in the *Phenomenology*—the critical reconstruction of the successive stages in the self-formation of the subject—is viewed as a self-understanding which attempt to restore suppressed dimensions of this formative process in order to break down the constraints of past forms of consciousness and, in so doing, to transform social practice. The reflective transcendence of rigidified modes of consciousness is at the same time a transformation of rigidified forms of life which express and are expressed in this consciousness. In inverting Hegel's belief that mind is the ground of nature, Marx understood social labor as the basic mechanism in the social evolution of the human species *and* the force behind the historical changes of the transcendental framework of experience. In the light of this "transcendentally conceived notion of material synthesis," the human subject is viewed not only as producing his world through labor, but as himself a product of past systems of social labor. From this perspective, Hegel's notion of phenomenological critique is reinterpreted as the historical struggle to achieve self-consciousness by comprehending the self-formative processes of past generations and breaking through the constraints inherent in reified socio-economic structures. It is in the conceptualization of this moment of critical practice, Schroyer argues, that Marx's work proves inadequate and requires supplementation from Habermas.

For Habermas, psychoanalysis is relevant as "the only tangible example of a science incorporating methodical self-reflection."[4] Despite his "scientistic self-misunderstanding," Freud provided us with a model for a systematically generalized self-reflection which joins hermeneutic interpretive procedures with generalizing operations and causal analyses typical of the natural sciences. Methodical self-reflection, in grasping the self-formative processes of an active subject, mediates false consciousness analytically *and* practically. It comprehends the causality of repressed and split-off symbols in the context of deformed communication and, under certain conditions, frees the subject from the constraints of this "causality of fate" which operates like a "second nature." Psychoanalytic self-reflection is thus emancipatory reflection guided by the emancipatory interest in reason.

Schroyer, following Habermas, regards psychoanalysis as a prototype for conceptualizing the dialectic between social domination, the critique of it, and the struggle to overcome it. In this framework "power" and "ideology" and the

4. *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston, 1971), p. 214.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

movement of reflection directed against them acquire a different and more substantial role than they do for Marx. Marx, in failing to grasp power and ideology as distorted communication, was unable to provide an adequate account of the status of the critical science which was supposed to reconstruct the self-constitution of the species. The sources of this weakness lay in his restriction of the materialist concept of synthesis to the categorical framework of instrumental action, i.e. labor. In contrast, Habermas views the history of the species as determined simultaneously by the reproduction of the material conditions of life (labor) *and* by systems of symbolic interaction. The institutional framework of society is based on social norms which cannot be reduced to technical rules for the successful mastery of nature, and is rooted in ordinary language communication which cannot be replaced by the specialized languages of science and technology. It is in this dimension that the emergence of institutions from structures of distorted communication, i.e. power and ideology, must be reflectively grasped, criticized, and dissolved (not, of course, in isolation from developments in the system of social labor, which produce the objective possibility of mitigating the repressive force of the institutional framework and replacing it by rational self-determination.)

Pursuing this line of thought, Habermas has recently developed the outlines of a theory of ordinary language communication.[5] Among the fundamental presuppositions of ordinary processes of speech and interaction are certain idealizations or counterfactual assumptions. In as much as interaction involves regarding the other as subject, it involves supposing that he knows what he is doing and why he is doing it, that is, that he intentionally holds the beliefs he does and is capable of discursively justifying them if the question should arise. In other words, the "model of pure communicative action (interaction)" involves the assumption that the interacting subjects are capable of discursively justifying their beliefs and norms and thus points implicitly to discourse as a possible form of communication. Although this assumption of accountability is a normal feature of functioning language games, it is at the same time usually counterfactual—the exception is the rule in human history.

That this assumption is counterfactual, and that it nevertheless persists as an expectation can, according to Habermas, be explained in a theory of systematically distorted communication. "But if this is the case, how can counterfactual expectations be stabilized? This can only be achieved by means of the legitimation of the ruling system of norms through the anchoring of the belief in legitimacy in systematic barriers to will-forming communication. The claim that our norms can be grounded is redeemed through a legitimating global view of man and nature. The validity of these global views is in turn secured in a communication structure which excludes discursive will-formation. . . . The barriers to communication which make a fiction precisely of the reciprocal imputation of accountability, support at the same time the belief in legitimacy which sustains the fiction and prevents its being found out. That is the paradoxical achievement of ideologies. . . ."[6]

5. Relevant publications in English are "On Systematically Distorted Communication" and "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence" in *Inquiry* (v. 13, 1970), pp. 205-218 and 360-375; the "Introduction" to *Theory and Practice* (Boston, 1973); and "A Postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*" in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (v. 3, 1973), pp. 157-189. See also "A Theory of Communicative Competence" by T. McCarthy in the same issue of *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*.

6. "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz" in *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Frankfurt, 1971), p. 120.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The speech situation of discourse represents a certain break with the normal action context in that, ideally, it requires a "virtualization of the constraints of action," a putting out of play of all motives except that of a willingness to come to an understanding. The very act of participating in a discourse, of attempting discursively to come to an agreement about the truth of a problematic statement or the suitability of a problematic norm, carries with it the supposition that genuine agreement is possible. If we did not suppose that a grounded consensus were possible and could in some way be distinguished from a false consensus, then the very meaning of discourse, indeed of speech, would be called into question. In attempting to come to a rational decision about such matters, we must suppose that the outcome of our discussion will be the result simply of the force of the better argument and not of accidental or systematic constraints on discussion. The absence of constraint, this exclusion of systematically distorted communication can be characterized formally in terms of the pragmatic structure of communication. Habermas' characterization of the "ideal speech situation," in which discourse results in genuine consensus, includes linguistic conceptualizations of the traditional ideas of 'truth,' 'freedom' and 'justice.'

The result, then, of Habermas' analysis of the structure of communication is that it rests on a normative basis. In discussing we assume the reality of the ideal speech situation. It is "anticipated," but as anticipated also "effective." Whether this anticipated form of communication, this anticipated form of life, is simply a delusion, or whether the empirical conditions for even its approximate attainment can be practically realized is a question which does not admit of an a priori answer. "The fundamental norms of rational speech which are built into universal pragmatics contain from this point of view a practical hypothesis."[7]

Although Schroyer considers the theory of communicative competence—especially its capacity to express the normative character of social reality and to provide a normative standard for the critique of domination—as an advance beyond Marx, he feels that Habermas "has not demonstrated their relation to Marx's critique of political economy" (p. 165). Marx remains the only viable basis for critical theory because "Habermas' formalistically derived ideal has no components that express historical relations" as did "Marx's ideal of use value in its ideal of an 'organic' relation between production, distribution, and the mediation between universal and individual needs" (p. 167). But this does not obviate the necessity of reconstructing the objectivistic aspects of Marx's work along the lines established by Habermas. "It is not either Marx or Habermas but Marx and Habermas that make possible a critical dialectical theory" (p. 165).

On this point, Schroyer is really much closer to Habermas that he imagines. The theory of systematically distorted communication is not intended as a replacement for historical materialism *in toto*. If it is to provide a satisfactory framework for understanding social evolution it must, according to Habermas, be "linked convincingly with the precisely rendered fundamental assumptions of historical materialism."[8] This linkage, already initiated in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (cf. ch. 12 in particular), has been further developed in more recent works.[9] In his

7. "Wahrheitstheorien" in *Festschrift für W. Schulz* (1973), p. 259.

8. *Theory and Practice* (Boston, 1973), p. 12.

9. Cf. "Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Niklas Luhmann" in *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 142-290; and *Legitimationsprobleme im Spaetkapitalismus* (Frankfurt, 1973), which is soon to appear in English translation from Beacon Press.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

critique of systems theory, for example, Habermas argues at some length that an adequate theory of social evolution would have to proceed in three dimensions: the development of the forces of production, the development of organizational forms and techniques which enhance the steering capacity of societies, and the development and critical dissolution of legitimating interpretive systems.[10] And in his most recent work on *Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism*, we are provided with an analysis which integrates the economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions in the way which Schroyer has so convincingly argued is necessary.

In finding himself forced to return to Marx, however, Schroyer short circuits precisely the effort to critically engage the non-Marxist traditions of social science for which he praises Habermas (p. 137). The costs of this retreat become evident in the last chapter of his book, "The Crisis of American Capitalism: a Preliminary Conceptualization," which is intended as a "first-approximation of the application of a unified critical theory to the dynamics of American capitalism...." (p. 173). If one compares this treatment to Habermas' *Legitimation Problems*, which has the same intent, one is struck by the relatively small place assigned to the analysis of socio-cultural components, which it was, after all, the aim of the book to systematically incorporate into critical theory. After a brief, "speculative reformulation" of the political economic indicators of crisis, Schroyer turns to its socio-cultural dimensions (pp. 238 f.). His discussion focuses on the emergence and functioning of the interventionist state in late-capitalist society, and to the "depoliticizing of politics" which is needed to sustain it. It is at this point, one expects, that the metatheoretical framework he has developed for conceptualizing the link between domination and emancipation would be fruitfully applied to a concrete analysis of the socio-cultural elements of crisis. Instead we are provided with a list of groups identified as "exploited" and "alienated," and a general reminder of the irrationality of the growing "rationalization" of life. The metatheoretical framework is applied only in the concluding section on "The Dialectic of Domination and Emancipation," where the problem is defined as that of a "speculative critique [which] is able to anticipate modes of emancipation" (p. 247). It is the separation between speculative critique and "critical science [which] ends with the empirical critique of domination inherent in a specific social context" (p. 247), which is at the root of the problem. Granted that reflective critique and practical emancipation are to be distinguished, the argument of Schroyer's book seeks to establish that they are also essentially interrelated. The critical reconstruction of distorted structures of communication must be rich enough to suggest definite directions for the transformation of social practice. In spite of his sensitivity to the problem and the soundness of the case he makes for going beyond Marx, Schroyer fails in his reconstruction of crisis theory to *systematically* incorporate the dimensions which he finds lacking in Marx.

To renew today the attempt made by Marx to create a critical science, requires nothing less than what was required of Marx. Just as he attempted the "critical sublation (*Aufhebung*)" of German philosophy, French political theory and English economics (p. 156), the critical theorist of today must transcend while preserving the results of non-Marxist social inquiry. This is no easy task, and certainly not a task for a single individual. But anything less than this will continue to produce that

10. "Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie?...," *op. cit.*, pp. 270 f.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peculiarly abstract and speculative—one is tempted to say "metaphysical"—employment of Marxist categories which were developed, ironically, for the concrete analysis and critique of social change. It is time we absorbed the important lessons to be learned from books like Schroyer's and moved on to the formidable tasks they imply.

Thomas McCarthy

Paul Sweezy & Charles Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

In this collection of essays, Sweezy and Bettelheim are distinguished in style: Sweezy writing journalistically, with much quotation from newspaper-writers and reference to real events; Bettelheim staying resolutely on an abstract plane, his "scientifico-philosophical" approach to the "depths" beneath the "surface" emphasized by his "use" of inverted commas. Nonetheless they find themselves, at the conclusion of their theoretical labors, sharing roughly the same position. This position is, in brief, the following:

Socialism means the power of the proletariat—the working class—over the social decision-making. The working class, however, molded by capitalist society, is incapable of developing concepts and forms of organization permitting it to take and hold this power. This problem is intensified, in the case of the underdeveloped coutries where anticapitalist revolutions have actually taken place, by the numerical weakness of the proletariat. Therefore a Party of professional revolutionaries is needed, which distills from the workers' struggles (via its own scientific resources) a "proletarian ideology." Concentrating in itself, as it were, the essence of the proletariat, the Party must infuse the workers and the rest of the "people" with this ideology so that they back the seizure of state power to institute socialism.

So far this is just good old Leninism, the ideological background to the hymn of praise to the Soviet state with which Sweezy's first essay here, "Lessons of Soviet Experience," begins. But the evolution of Russian society in the post-Stalin period has apparently raised new questions. There has arisen a gulf between the Party as a ruling stratum and the workers; the principle of central economic planning seems to be giving way to a return to market relations. How is this "return to the capitalist road" to be explained? Answer: just as the Party can have a proletarian practice, so it can have a bourgeois practice; as it can lead the workers to a realization of "their own" aims, so it can lead these eternal followers to the restoration of bourgeois power. The *key factor* is *the behavior of the Party* vis-à-vis the masses: whether it remains in contact with them, developing their ideas and organizing means to put them into practice, or whether instead it imposes on them aims derived from the shadowy "bourgeois forces" which remain after the revolution. Both possibilities exist, and degeneration is not necessary. If the Russian experience exemplifies the second, the first is gloriously illustrated by China's reaffirmation of the socialist road in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We will go over this position in some detail. But after fifty years of theoretical and practical "Marxism-Leninism" this approach to the question of the "transition to socialism" should be of interest only to those who dream of representing the workers in the construction of a party which will seize power in their name. It remains a topic of talk for would-be revolutionists only because of the absence of a real workers' movement, which would leave us less time and energy for wandering in the byways of ideology. It is of no interest to the workers, whose current job actions and wildcats may be laying the basis for such a movement in the future. We can be sure it is of no interest to Chou En Lai, when he discusses with Kissinger the future of Vietnam and Chinese-American trade. The workers and the rulers, of whatever country, must deal with realities. They know that in China, as in Russia, as in America, the working population does not decide on economic (or foreign political) policy. The workers try to get by with as good a life as possible, while their bosses strive to extract from them as much surplus labor as possible for their own purposes of accumulation and competition.[1] But perhaps for us, who after decades without a real labor movement, are forced to work out anew accurate concepts of capitalism and communism, it may be useful to descend into that particular place in the kingdom of dreams called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

These three -isms make strange bedfellows indeed. As Sweezy points out, Marx conceived of the communist movement his theory meant to serve as the work of proletarians in reaction to the conditions of developed industrial capitalism, while Lenin and Mao came to power in backward areas, on the crest of largely peasant revolutions. A solution to the problem posed here—not for Marxist theory but for Bolshevik ideology—is suggested by Sweezy in his curious concept of the *substitute proletariat* (p. 52), essentially accepted by Bettelheim (see p. 70). The peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, for example, can function as a proletariat if they have served as a solidary, selfsacrificing revolutionary force united with the proletariat under the guidance of the Party which represents the proletariat proper. Of course, from the Leninist point of view (as we shall see) the working class only really becomes "proletarian" when it is led by the proper Party. But then it is only a small step to saying that the Party, as bearer of the proletarian oil, can annoint with it whomever it wishes.

In another context, however, Bettelheim appears to reject the view of the relation of Party to masses on which the idea of the substitute proletariat depends. He emphasizes in a number of places that as the essence of socialism is "control of the direct producers over their conditions of existence" (p. 58) a party which wishes to play a role in socialist revolution can do so "only if it refrains from *imposing orders* on the masses and remains the *instrument* of their initiatives....The role of a proletarian party, therefore, is to help the masses to achieve *themselves* the tasks that correspond to their *basic* interests....[by] helping the masses to *organize themselves*" (pp. 62-63, all italics—here and elsewhere—the author's). To ensure

1. This is not to say that China, Russia, Cuba, etc. on the one hand, and the USA, etc. on the other, do not represent different types of society. (In fact I believe that Sweezy is in error in his belief that "Libermanism" is transforming Russia into a private capitalist system. While there is reason to think that Czechoslovakia was headed towards possible incorporation into the world market, the "profit-principle" in Russia functions as a technique for fulfillment of the plan.) Party-state-run societies and private capitalism follow different "laws of motion." They are alike in that both are class societies in which a few exploit the many.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this, "as Mao Tse-tung has written," proletarian dictatorship must "not apply within the ranks of the people" who "must enjoy freedom of speech, assembly, association, procession, religious belief, and so on" (p. 63). Brave words: the very program of the Kronstadt rebels, shot down at Lenin's orders (by troops under Trotsky's command) in 1921 for demanding freely elected soviets and an end to the Bolshevik monopoly of power. Mao's reaction when his call for a hundred flowers to blossom was taken seriously as is also well known, as is the treatment of the various oppositions to the Maoist line which emerged in that super shake-up, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

How are we to explain Bettelheim's reconciliation of this position with his discovery of the death-point of Russian socialism in the so-called *de-Stalinization* formalized at the XX Congress of the Russian party (see p. 17)? (This is, of course, the standard Maoist position.) The riddle is answered if we put Bettelheim's words back into context, when it can be seen that his position is self-contradictory only if we take those words to mean what they say, departing from their special, Leninist use.

Let us retrace the argument. Sweezy begins it with a statement on the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, in which he claims that the latter country was indeed on the road back to capitalism—but that Russia is too. This is supposedly shown by the tendency, common to the Russian-controlled bloc as a whole, to substitute market structures for the centrally planned system set up by the Revolution of 1917 in Russia and imposed elsewhere by Stalin's army (p. 89). Bettelheim replies by saying that the issue is not: plan or market, but: who has power, the bourgeois or the proletariat. This divorce of the "economic" from the social-political is of course nonsensical from a Marxist point of view, but for this Leninist the structures by which the economy is organized are surface forms, compatible with different social-political power structures during the "period of transition." Of course, Bettelheim admits, the historical task of the creation of communism ultimately involves the complete supplanting of the market by the planning principle, but in the course of this task the state power may and must make use of a mixture of both techniques. The market, like the state, cannot be abolished; it must wither away during the period of transition (p. 19). What is essential is the direction of the trend: away from, or toward market relations. And the trend is decided by which class controls the state which chooses the mix of techniques at any time (pp. 16ff).

With this Sweezy is eager to agree (pp. 27ff). To Bettelheim's next contribution, an elaboration of his concept of the large degree of independence of economic and political structures, Sweezy replies with the obvious question: how do we tell whether or not the proletariat is in power (p. 49)? (It is in this context that he develops the idea of the "substitute proletariat.") It is Bettelheim's answer to this question that we must now, alas, examine carefully. The line of the argument may by traced as follows:

(1) "...the true class nature of revolutionary state power" may be determined by "the *nature of the class interests* served by it" (p. 56).

(2) This is to be established by seeing "*who* is served by the state power" and by checking "the *concrete relations* between the organs of state power and the laboring masses" (p. 57).

(3) The dictatorship of the proletariat—what we are after—depends on "whether the producers are in power" (p. 57) and thus on "the *non-separation* of the proletarian state apparatus from the masses, its *subordination* to the masses" (p. 58).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This means, e.g., no monopolization of political power and no repressive forces at the state's disposal.—How will Bettelheim square this criterion with his designation of Lenin's Russia, with its Bolshevik dictatorship and Cheka (not to mention Stalin's Russia) or Mao's China as "socialist"? The answer is soon to come:

(4) To be socialist the state apparatus must be "*subject to control by a party which is linked to the masses, and which helps the masses to struggle to gain control over the use made of the means of production...*" (p. 59). That is, the producers are "in power" (see (3)) iff they are "linked" to a party which actually *is* in power; the masses control the means of production if this party is helping them to gain such control.—What is one to make of this stuff? One would think that either "the masses" have state (or any other) power or they do not; that they either control the means of production or must still struggle to gain this control. But no: this is too easy. Let us return to Bettelheim, who will make it clear how the workers can be in power before they are in power.

(5) "Historical experience shows that because of the weight of the dominant ideological relationships resulting from centuries of oppression," etc., "the political forms which are intended to enable the direct producers to organize themselves as a ruling class tend, if a systematic struggle is not waged against this tendency, spontaneously to transform themselves in the direction of...a *new separation between the masses and the state apparatus*" (p. 60). The political forms he means are those created by the workers themselves in the course of struggle—Bettelheim cites as examples the Paris Commune of 1871 and the 1917 soviets (also, curiously enough, the Chinese PLA which was organized neither by workers nor by themselves). We pass over (but will return to) the fact that the historical experience is not so one-sided. Here we are interested not in the facts but in the twists and turns of the Leninist position as laid out by Bettelheim. The workers, he asserts, cannot keep power by themselves; they are "partially *separated*" from the "proletarian world view" "by bourgeois ideology" (pp. 64, 68). Hence

(6) "the necessity to build a *specifically proletarian ideological and political apparatus*, a Marxist-Leninist party which *embodies* the proletarian ideology" (p. 68, and see p. 61, top of page). The "non-separation" of the masses from power can only be assured by...their separation from state power by the width of the Party. And the "proletarian ideology," unstable among the proletarians themselves, is to be preserved in the person of the Party, to be appropriated by the masses. This new Savior says to his flock: this is *your* body, this is *your* blood. And the flock need only be open to grace to receive it: "The effective dominant role of the workers grows to the extent to which the proletarian ideology becomes their own ideology" (pp. 64, 70).

What makes an ideology proletarian? Not, on this view, that it is actually held by proletarians—who may yet have to appropriate it—but that it is developed "on the basis of an analysis of the objective position of the proletariat" (p. 67). Similarly with revolutions (and here is the solution to the problem of socialism in pre-capitalist areas): "The proletarian character of a revolution, in fact, depends more on the *dominant role* of the proletarian ideology and of the party which embodies this ideology than on the 'numerical' strength of the proletariat" (p. 69).

Thus are all riddles answered. It all depends on the Party. The Party must *submit itself to* the masses, accepting their criticisms and fulfilling their wishes—but the decision as to what these wishes are, is the Party's, made by means of the "Marxist-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leninist" analysis. Given the Party, one can have a proletarian revolution with a mainly non-proletarian population. And while the key to preservation and extension of the revolution is the Party's "linkage" with the masses, this too is up, not to the masses, but to the Party. "The only 'guarantee' of progress along the road to socialism is the real capacity of the ruling party not to become separated from the masses" (p. 73). That Russia (perhaps only after Stalin) took the low road and China the high one is due to the different behaviors of the two parties.

Now what seemed contradictory seems clear—until one remembers that both roads are leading to the White House door. But perhaps Bettelheim will point out that this is just a "surface" phenomenon, like the Stalin-Hitler pact. So we return to the "theoretical" level: *what* makes one Party remain linked to the masses and another lose touch? To this no answer is proferred. It apparently depends on the pure will of the Party whether it "serves the people" or the bourgeoisie. At this point, the theoretical edifice seems a bit shaky, with events of such historical magnitude decided by the good will of "the upper echelons of the ruling party" (p. 61). Does our future really depend on the integrity of a few politicos? Have we, "the masses," so little role of our own to play, and they such freedom of action? It seems we must look at the whole matter again from another point of view.

It is appropriate to begin with a "rectification of names." Surely it can only help matters to call things what they are. Let us agree, therefore, to call "proletarian consciousness" nothing but the consciousness of the masses of workers—it will thus be, at most times, a fairly heterogeneous thing; let us call the ideas of Leninists, "Leninist ideas," however closely they may correspond to workers' interests. And let us speak of proletarian power only when the working *class*—and not a specially organized body—directly is responsible for decision-making, no matter how stupid their decisions. This means, to be more concrete, that all representatives of the workers be revocable at all times, that whatever planning or coordinating centers there be possess no army, secret police, etc.

Examples of proletarian power in this sense are to be found in the structures of the historical experience to which Bettelheim refers: the Commune (perhaps), the Russian soviets of 1917 (actually the factory committees are much more rightfully called organs of workers' power)—to which we may add the soviets of 1905, the German workers' councils of 1918, the Italian factory councils of 1920, the Spanish workers' and peasants' federations of 1936-7, the Hungarian councils of 1956. In some of these cases, something like Bettelheim's too abstract account, stressing their fragility, holds good. The German workers, for instance, with power in their hands, gave it over to the Socialist Party which they believed would represent them in the state. Indeed, it seems accurate to call the belief that some special body of professional revolutionaries can make socialism for us a holdover of bourgeois ideology (though it is to be usefully explained not with phrases about "centuries of oppression" but by tracing the history of, e.g., the German workers' movement). The case of the factory councils of 1917 in Russian is different. These supported the Bolsheviks, but did not simply had over full power to them for good. It took Lenin's government 'till 1921 completely to eliminate the decision-making power of the organized workers, and it was finally accomplished in the case of Petrograd-Kronstadt only by the use of armed force. (One could argue, in contrast, that the peasants have never—despite the terror—been completely subdued 'till this day.) Of course it would be wrong to blame the "bad will" of the Bolsheviks for the failure of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Russian workers to hold social power, in a revolution dominated by peasants eager for private property. But it is important to note that the factory committees collapsed not from a failure of spontaneity but as a result of an historical situation within which the Party acted as the executioner of workers' power. In Spain the workers and peasants—also in an impossible historical situation—were crushed by the Communist Party and then by France; in Hungary the workers' rebellion was destroyed by Russian tanks.

Indeed all these cases ended in failure, and yet they are crucial for an understanding of the possibility of communist revolution. The universality of the workplace committee or council (most recently experienced in the form of the action and strike committees in May '68 in France) as the organizational form of workingclass revolt both is an important confirmation of Marx's ideas on the subject and allows us to develop them far beyond the point open to Marx. Capitalism has created the possibility of socialism (or communism) by creating the working class—i.e., by consisting in an economic structure in which production is de facto social even while control over it remains in the private hands of the market economy, living conditions become unbearable for the mass of the population who do the work, they are forced to rebel in a *social* way. Peasants may individually seize plots of land, but auto workers can only appropriate their factory collectively, and in combination with the seizure of steel and rubber factories, of bakeries and dairy farms, by those who work in those places. It is this origin of the concept of communism and of communist practice alike in the world experienced by workers, with whose character they must deal, which makes inane the concept of the substitute proletariat. The history of the long struggle of the Party—in China and the USSR alike—to proletarianize the peasantry should be evidence enough.

It is this also which makes it silly to contrast "spontaneity" with revolutionary organization; this puts the problem of the forms of revolt in a misleading way. Any attempt of workers to take any degree of social power demands—and has always produced—varying degrees of organization on local and broader levels. What is striking, if we look at history, is the minimal role played by the organizations of the Left in the structuring of revolutionary struggle, and the extent to which they have served in fact as brakes on the workers' efforts. Just as the origin of proletarian revolt lies in the workers' experience of capitalism's incapacity to meet their desires, the organizational forms of revolt are developed out of the social structures of the system. The fact is that the workers are already organized: in the factories offices, schools, neighborhoods, and in the interconnections between all of these established by the capitalist production system. The problem of the organization of communist revolution is really that of the workers' taking the existing network of social interdependency into their own hands, and then reorganizing it to meet their needs.

Conscious revolutionaries, of different persuasions, have their own problems of organization—different ones at different times. Although these may be related to the organizational needs of the class as a whole, the important thing is to recognize the distinction between the class and the political groupings within it. A revolutionary group may feel, as Leninists do, that *their* holding of power is crucial to the building of socialism. But it ought to be kept clear that the power of the Party is not the power of the masses themselves, however representative of the latter the former may be at one time or another. (This was recognized by the Russian Bolsheviks when they banned all political groupings except their own; for the party voted in could be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voted out.) If the workers are still willing to let some special group monopolize power and make decisions for them, this means only that socialism is not on the agenda. A group which wishes for the seizure of power by the class of which it is a part has a different problem: that of working in their class through propaganda and action to help ensure that no special group is allowed to give orders to it. This involves, obviously, struggle against Leninism in all its varieties.

It is not an insignificant fact that Leninist groupings have played no revolutionary role outside of the underdeveloped world. Under capitalist conditions they are doomed to be either liberal reform parties or conspiratorial sects, in either case significant only as expressive of the need—quite likely impossible of satisfaction—of capitalist class domination to transcend its own private property structure and thus ensure, through centralized planning, its future existence. In the underdeveloped world, however, they have had, and have, a role to play—that of the bourgeoisie which itself for historical reasons is unable to create the conditions for modern industrial development and class relations. The Russian and Chinese revolutions are more like the French Revolution of 1789 (though this comparison cannot be taken too far) than they are like the one we in industrialized states may hope to participate in. Like the bourgeois revolution of the past, the new class which rose to power in the context of the overthrow of the old order by conflicting social forces, describes its rule as the victory of the People, whose conflicting but "non-antagonistic" (Mao) class interests are reconciled in their collective domination by the state. This ideology, like that of bourgeois liberalism, only serves to hide—more or less well at different times—the class struggle which goes on throughout the process by which peasants are transformed into workers and workers give up their labor to be accumulated.

Only from the viewpoint of this ideology can the economic "forms" be distinguished from social and political "content." (This is, of course, the whole point of *Capital*.) Sweezy's formulation nicely illustrates the situation: "All anti-capitalist revolutions that have hitherto taken place. . . have been faced with an urgent problem of how to run the economy." The mix between market and plan arises from the historical situation faced by the new government. "Prices, money, and even private markets remain, but these commodity-money relations are increasingly adapted and subjected to the plans developed to achieve the aims of the new men in power"—in the Russian case, "the Bolshevik Party. . .[which] found itself lacking any real class base with responsibility [to whom?!] for governing and leading a country with an overwhelming peasant and petty-bourgeois majority" (pp. 47, 48, 51). From this point of view, the market can appear not as an aspect of the system of social relationships which constitute private property capitalism but as a "technique of resource allocation" which might be emphasized at the expense of planning, thus leading to a return to the "capitalist road." Like all ideology, this contains some truth, but presents it in a useless form. The "market" in the USSR today is, as noted above, not a real market but a technique—not however for resource allocation (which it isn't, strictly speaking, under capitalism either) but for working out the plan. (I ignore here what markets—black and other—exist in Russia alongside the planned sector, as well as Russia's participation in the world market.) And Russia (like China) was as much run by a "ruling stratum" (Sweezy dislikes the word "class" in this context, for most unMarxist reasons; but one can understand his discomfort)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when it was more contrally planned as it does today when the mix is supposed to have shifted to the market.

Bettelheim observes that "the notion of a 'direct' and 'immediate' abolition of market relations is as utopian and dangerous as the 'immediate abolition' of the state, and is *similar in nature*" (p. 19). The two are indeed related, market relations being the economic form of bourgeois rule whose place is taken in Russia, China, etc. by the controllers of the Party-state. The ideology of this state makes its own nature as obscure as the difference between the capitalist market and the state's use of the market-form. Bettelheim puts his finger on the real issue when he says that the heart of the matter is not planning but who makes the plan. But that his enunciation of this truth only represents the party dictatorship's bow in the direction of the "workers' control" now so popular also in the West is evident from his insistence that "plan or market" is therefore a false problem. If the right Party makes the plan, it may also make use of the market. Socialism in any case depends on the primacy of the Party.

As Sweezy says, he and Bettelheim, really agree on essential points; and the latter concurs that progress has been made in the discussion. Both of them, like everyone else, are for representative government, economic progress, and workers' control—as long as the class they speak for holds power. We can safely leave this triumph of Marxist-Leninist science to those who like that sort of thing; we have our own problems to worry about.

Paul Mattick, Jr.

Robert M. Laxer, ed., (*Canada*) *Ltd.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973.

This book is the most important document produced by the Canadian Left in recent years. It combines a coherent Marxist analysis of the political economy of Canada with a strategy for building a Canadian socialist movement. It will no doubt be at the center of radical political discussion in Canada for some time to come.

The content of (*Canada*) *Ltd.* was first presented in lecture form in Toronto in early 1973 by members of the Ontario Waffle. The Waffle is an independent left-wing organization which is strong in Ontario and Saskatchewan and has supporters in several of the other English-speaking provinces. Originally a caucus within the NDP (New Democratic Party), the Ontario Waffle was expelled in June, 1972, for its radical nationalism. Since then, the Waffle has been organizing in Ontario on a program of "independence and socialism." At a recent convention, Ontario Wafflers voted to work toward the formation of a new socialist party. (*Canada*) *Ltd.* is particularly important, then, as the main theoretical basis so far for the new party formation.

Although the chapters of the book range over a variety of topics, there is a central interconnected series of arguments which emerge again and again. Canada is understood to be a dependent capitalist economy, characterized by capitalist relations of production but involved in a hinterland-metropolis relationship with the U.S. in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which it tends increasingly to become an exporter of resources and an importer of finished goods, with all the consequences of underdevelopment that such dependency implies.

The seminal writing within this framework is a paper by Tom Naylor, "The rise and fall of the third commercial empire of the St. Lawrence," published in Gary Teeple, ed., *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). Naylor has restated the main features of his thesis in a chapter of (*Canada*) *Ltd.*, "The History of Domestic and Foreign Capital in Canada." Essentially Naylor's argument is that "The most striking characteristic of Canadian development...is the degree to which commercial capital began *and remained* at the top of the socio-economic ladder..." (p. 44). That is, the Canadian capitalist class performed a mercantile and financial function within the British Empire, facilitating the development of an export trade in staples and an internal transportation network, financed primarily by indirect British portfolio investment. After the establishment of a tariff in the late nineteenth century, manufacturing developed through the introduction of American branch-plants. Canadian capital is thus located for the most part in banks, trusts, insurance companies, and transport and service industries. *There is no significant domestic industrial bourgeoisie in Canada.*

Naylor's argument has important implications for political strategy. If the Canadian capitalist class is essentially a commercial and not an industrial class, then it has no interest in reducing its dependency upon foreign industrial capital. Conversely, its material well-being is dependent upon continuing to serve as junior partner to American multi-national corporations. Therefore, the Canadian bourgeoisie, as a whole (and with some exceptions), has no national aspirations and cannot form the leadership in a movement for national independence. In other words, given the nature of the Canadian capitalist, only a genuine thrust toward national independence; and, given the character of the Canadian political economy, only a movement for independence can achieve socialism in Canada. Thus, for the Waffle, independence and socialism are indissolubly linked.

That this is so can be seen in the two basic problems facing the Canadian economy today: de-industrialization and the resource sell-out. In an article on "Canadian Manufacturing and U.S. Trade Policy," Jim Laxer points out that "as long as the American empire was expanding, expansion occurred in Canada" (p. 135). American ownership meant a qualitative undermining of Canadian industry, but at least the establishment of branch plants provided jobs. Now, however, the American economy is faced with renewed inter-imperialist rivalry with Germany and Japan. The solution, encouraged by U.S. economic policies, is to increase capital investment within the U.S. in order to strengthen the U.S. manufacturing position in world competition. For Canada, this means de-industrialization: plant closings, lay-offs for workers and, since state expenditures are ultimately dependent upon industrial productivity, an increasing fiscal crisis of the state. Furthermore, "As de-industrialization proceeds, Canada's economy is becoming more dependent on the resource industries and on the service industries... As manufacturing shrinks relatively, the economy is burdened with an ever-larger portion of its work force in service industries. About two-thirds of the work force is now in service industries, the highest proportion of any country in the world. This places an increasing squeeze on salaries of workers in the service industries..." (p. 145).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not only Canadian manufacturing but Canadian resources are also decisively affected by Canada's dependency upon the U.S. Mel Watkins, in his article, "Resources and Underdevelopment," shows how America is attempting to meet its energy needs at Canada's expense. The demands for a continental energy system are demands for a continuation of Canada's historic role as "hewers of wood and drawers of water." But in addition, the exploitation of Canadian resources has important consequences for the rest of the economy. As Watkins points out, the export market for the new staples (oil and gas) is mainly in the U.S., thus increasing Canadian integration into the American imperial orbit; the instrument for resource exploitation is the multi-national corporation, which appropriates not only the resource but also the economic surplus for the metropolis; and finally, "the production of the staple increasingly uses large amounts of capital, or machinery, and relatively little labour—and much of the machinery is imported. As a result, the effect on jobs of staple production has declined..." (p. 121).

Perhaps most importantly, the resource sell-out will have important effects on de-industrialization. In discussing the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline, Watkins outlines four of these effects. First, in terms of financing, the "pipeline will partly be financed inside Canada, and to that extent will attract capital away from manufacturing and limit potential jobs in that sector. It will partly be financed by importing capital, and to that extent, will drive up the value of the Canadian dollar on the foreign exchanges. That, in turn, increases the cost of exports, decreases the cost of imports, and by both routes destroys jobs" (p. 122). Second, since Canadian resources will be channeled to the U.S. market, energy costs in Canada itself will be raised, thus eroding Canadian industrial potential. Third, although few new jobs will be generated in Canada, America will insist that, in exchange for its importation of oil and gas, Canada must "buy back manufactured goods which embody relatively more labour. The result is the destruction of jobs in Canada" (p. 124). Finally, Watkins suggests that resource development will absorb the creative energies of Canadians, preventing them from working out an adequate industrial strategy. Thus, the resource sell-out and de-industrialization are intimately related, and both are consequences of the dependent character of the Canadian political economy.

If the Waffle analysis is correct, then only a movement oriented to public ownership of all natural resources and the establishment of a domestically owned and operated industrial base can avert tragedy for the Canadian working class. Given the preceding analysis, it is clear that the Canadian bourgeoisie cannot lead such a movement. This brings us to the important issue of the Waffle's relation to the NDP. The NDP claims to represent the aspirations of Canadian working people. It is the inheritor of a long socialist tradition which goes back at least forty years to the founding of the CCF (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation) in 1933, a primarily Western-based populist movement. The NDP itself is a product of the merging of the CCF with the CLC (Canadian Labour Congress) in 1961. Thus the NDP from the start was strongly committed to and influenced by organized labor. But as Watkins points out, 62% of Canadian unionists in 1971 belonged to internatonal unions, i.e., American-based and -controlled unions. This puts the NDP in a peculiar position: dominated by American unions yet critical of American corporations. Nor is it only the well known business-unionism of the American internationals which is in question. Rather, the position of the union leadership of the international may be in direct opposition to the interests of Canadian workers, as the AFL-CIO's support for the Burke-Hartke bill shows (setting quotas on U.S. imports

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of manufactured goods at their late 1960's level). In other words, the NDP cannot be a real force against American imperialism because the NDP is dominated by interests which are directly tied into and benefit from that imperialism.

Thus the analysis of the Canadian political economy points toward the strategic need of the formation of a new socialist party based on a platform of independence and socialism. The question now arises whether the Waffle is equipped to provide the transitional form for such a party. In a recent issue of *Canadian Dimension* (April, 1974), an independent socialist journal, Leo Panitch and Reg Whitaker, in the course of a review of (*Canada*) *LTD.*, raised several questions about the Waffle position which deserve to be considered. The first centers on the relation of socialism and nationalism. There is an article in (*Canada*) *Ltd.* by Robin Mathews which attacks "American liberal individualism" and which contrasts it with the Canadian tradition of community and service. Aside from the hysterical and paranoid tone of the article (e.g., "The U.S. immigrant is always, in some blind portion of his or her being, a cultural imperialist"—p. 224), which is no doubt responsible for Panitch and Whitaker labeling it "a disgrace to a movement which thinks of itself as socialist" (p. 55), what is particularly troubling is the implied identification of traditional Canadian conservatism with a socialist perspective. As Naylor already pointed out in his article in the Teeple book, "Canada was born a conservative political economy because this is the ideological counterpart of merchant capitalism. Liberalism is the ideology of the industrial entrepreneur; industrialism breeds a philosophy of laissez-faire" (p. 18). Or as Panitch and Whitaker put it, "Mathews only sees liberal free trade as the enemy. Finance Capitalist Tory ideology is our very own traditional benefactor" (p. 55).

The appeal of the Waffle to the Canadian people is to a great extent based upon its nationalist perspective. It will not be easy to maintain a socialist commitment in the face of a possible loss of that appeal. Nor is it clear that this is only a public relations matter. Waffle strategy is founded on the need for nationalization of resources and industry, a need which follows directly from the specific character of its analysis of Canadian dependency. Only as an after-thought is there any mention in the book of the need for socialization, a need which follows from the contradiction between capital and labor.

This deficiency is related to Panitch and Whitaker's other main criticism: the overemphasis upon the thesis of de-industrialization. Here they accuse the authors of (*Canada*) *Ltd.* of not offering "the kind of statistical evidence which might be considered convincing to a skeptic." They go on to say that "Wafflers ought...to be quite careful about leaning too heavily upon a thesis which is, after all, a predictive hypothesis based on empirical evidence which, while persuasive is by no means convincing, and which, aside from the immediate tactical advantages it may offer to building bridges with the working class, is not finally essential to a Marxist critique of American capitalist domination" (p. 54). It is too early to tell whether the de-industrialization hypothesis is correct. However, it is clear that emphasis upon this hypothesis is again directly related to the Waffle's particular analytic framework. Any critique of the one must therefore come to grips with the other, something which Panitch and Whitaker fail to do.

(*Canada*) *Ltd.* demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of a socialist program based upon the analysis of a national political economy. On the one hand, there is a wealth of empirical information concerning the objective economic situation in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Canada. On the other hand, there is little insight into the importance of working-class self-activity in the formation of class-consciousness. Thus there is an almost "automatic" correlation between de-industrialization and a turn towards socialism. But this means that if the de-industrialization hypothesis were proven incorrect, the theoretical basis for a socialist movement would be eliminated. And even if it turned out to be true, a socialist solution to the problem is in no way ensured. There are places in (*Canada*) *Ltd.* where the link between objective law and subjective response seems to be guaranteed by the absence of an alternative (i.e., the lack of a native industrial bourgeoisie). But again, even if the Canadian capitalist class fits the image drawn by the authors, this *lack* in itself cannot perform any mediating function. Finally, the emphasis laid upon nationalization as the primary goal is also correlated with this concentration upon objective economic tendencies to the neglect of the subjective dimension. Leaving aside the reluctance of the American empire to permit such a solution, the question remains, how is this proposed nationalization related to the establishment of socialist relations of production and worker's self-management? Public ownership, even if possible under Canadian conditions, could very well take a bureaucratic and elitist form. And to regard socialization as a second stage to be accomplished *after* nationalization seems, in the light of history, naive at best. Nevertheless, none of these objections denies the importance of the analysis of the Canadian political economy provided by (*Canada*) *Ltd.* Any critique of Waffle strategy will ultimately have to come to terms with this analysis. Hopefully, the Waffle will integrate its best elements into a more dialectical social and political theory. At this point, however, (*Canada*) *Ltd.* remains the most advanced statement of the contemporary socialist movement in Canada.

Steve Levine

Adolfo Sanchez-Vasquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973. 287 pp.

This well unified collection of essays, first published in Mexico in 1965, develops basic concepts for a Marxist aesthetic theory. Sanchez-Vasquez places his work within the increasing contemporary emphasis on the "humanist character" of Marxism, opposing "Stalinist deformations" in Marxist theory and in socialism (5). The theory is centered on a dialectical theory of praxis developed mainly from Marx's early writings; thus the historical impulse to explode reified ideological concepts is at its root. Conceived as a struggle to achieve non-alienated, creative praxis, art expresses real needs for unfettered objectification and a sense of totality both in its production and in its consumption. Since these radical needs are historically mediated, art is always changing. On this basis Sanchez-Vasquez argues against any form of reductionism in aesthetic theory: against sociologism, for which a decadent society can produce only decadent art; against the reduction of art to ideology; against socialist realism (which he calls "socialist idealism"); against the imposition on art of Lenin's reflection theory of cognition in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and specifically against Lukács' concept of realism which reduces

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art to a form of representational cognition. Quoting Gramsci, Sanchez-Vasquez argues that any normative aesthetic only places ideological constraints on the understanding of a relatively autonomous activity whose essence as creative labor is to remedy such class limitations and divisions, and thus to point toward overcoming them. Instead, he insists on the autonomy of art in creating a new reality within the existing one: "It exists by itself with its own reality, into which that which it expresses or reflects is integrated. A work of art is primarily a human creation, and it exists through the creative power it incarnates" (41).

But Sanchez-Vasquez' opposition to dogmatism is much more than an attempt to establish the autonomy of art. Theory as well as art is a form of praxis: "As soon as theory stops changing, or a particular abstraction is regarded as definitive, or a limited set of determining factors is deemed sufficient to express reality, then theory ceases to have any value" (110). Insofar as concrete labor in art shatters cultural reifications, its study demands a dialectical method adequate to its historical complexity and dynamism. Pigeonholing art according to some external determinism, any reductionist Marxism, not only ignores but theoretically negates art's practical, creative significance—its significance in the historical struggle for liberation from class society which the theory itself is supposedly part of. As Sanchez-Vasquez indicates, in aesthetics or elsewhere reductionist Marxism impoverishes itslef. This radical, activist theoretical core of his book establishes a strong, coherent basis for Marxist aesthetic theory and, more generally, for critical Marxism. But the theory becomes fundamentally contradictory because at a crucial level he violates his own injunction against the reification of theoretical concepts.

Science is conceived positivistically, as the linear process of uncovering the fixed objective truth of "external reality"; it approaches a purely cognitive process in which the scientist rigorously suppresses his subjectivity in the increasingly faithful *reflection* of a purely objective reality outside him (50). For Sanchez-Vasquez, science and art are very different modes of activity: science and the material production based on it are characterized by historical "progress", whereas art is rooted in a perennial creative human essence and develops as a series of cultural negations which are relatively autonomous with respect to the "base": hence the universality of art (100).

Although Sanchez-Vasquez wants to make the critique of alienated labor the touchstone of his theory, he does not extend this critique to scientific labor or to the concept of "external nature". Instead, he universalizes both in a "scientific" Marxism which is humanized by the opposing postulate of an ontological creative "essence". This mechanical humanism is certainly hostile to a Marxism rooted in praxis; and as a result Sanchez-Vasquez' book contains a number of important contradictory formulations. He writes that even in socialism or communism, the exigencies of "material-utilitarian" production for specific needs will always constrain the general, essential human need for free creative objectification, which will always have to find its ultimate (unlimited) satisfaction in the separate realm of art (65,83). This "objective" contradiction between creativity and necessity is what necessitates an ideology of creativity in Sanchez-Vasquez' theory. But elsewhere he envisions a concrete utopia where the disalienation of labor has overcome the split between labor and art and has removed the blocks to creativity in all forms of social activity: where the reified opposition between material production and art has been abolished (286).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The relation between theory and practice is conceptualized in equally contradictory ways. As opposed to the quotation above about the need for dynamic theory, Sanchez-Vasquez writes in another passage that Marxism is a science (and an ideology) which "would lose its scientific character if it postulated theses which history, praxis, or experience contradicted" (108). And he sharply demarcates aesthetic theory from art criticism: his concern is the former, which as a science must formulate "the essence of art, the structure of all works of art...the laws that regulate the development of art from its very origins,...the legitimacy of all art" (107). "Marxist aesthetic theory attempts to give an account of what is, not of what should be" (108). But in order to provide a panhistoric "scientific" reference point in aesthetic theory which history cannot contradict, Sanchez-Vasquez invokes an ontologized creativity—which, however, is indefagitable precisely because it *should be* liberated and incessantly strives toward liberation: and this "should be" is what establishes "the legitimacy of all art." In Sanchez-Vasquez' book as in bourgeois theory, the attempt to exclude social teleology from science produces ideological contradictions. And since in this aesthetic science art historically expresses an essential human need rather than particular needs which are historically produced and real only historically, it does cut itself off from art *criticism* of specific works. The historicity of art becomes only an external focus (or distortion) for the aesthetic impulse: a lens through which an energy outside it shines. Art thus becomes an ideal form of praxis: this conceptualization severs it from historical praxis. Like "external reality", the aesthetic need becomes an external force mediated by, but not created dialectically within, society. Sanchez-Vasquez' tripartite reality shows this structure in his argument: there is 1) external reality (nature, transparently represented in science); 2) humanized reality (external reality humanized by labor); and 3) human reality "radiating through humanized external reality and enriching our knowledge of man" (33). As a humanist Marxist, Sanchez-Vasquez often stresses that the human world and the human being are human creations. But he also wants to be a scientist, and his theory reproduces the bourgeois ideology of science. Superimposing this objectivistic ideology on the dialectics of praxis leads this scientific humanist Marxism toward the reciprocal traps of bourgeois humanism and the Marxist dogmatism it opposes: it leads to an ontologized split between man and nature, and thus between art and material production. Creative social praxis is embedded in a material "base" of relations in "external" nature which are onesidedly determined by immutable scientific laws. When science and nature are located beyond human praxis, art becomes the most highly developed refuge of an equally immutable creative essence which diametrically opposes natural determinism. Art then is rather reactive, always practiced against a fundamentally hostile material world.

Sanchez-Vasquez argues pointedly against reducing art to ideology; but at times he does relegate art to the "ideological superstructure" (106, 160). This unexplained backtracking is part of his effort to establish the relative autonomy of art—the "law of uneven development of art and economy"—on a "scientific" basis. "The degree of that autonomy varies directly with the number of intermediary connecting links between art and the economic base": we must examine not the economic base of the society art is produced in but instead the mediations between base and superstructure, which establish a "distance" between the two (160). A major theme in Sanchez-Vasquez' book is the development of Marx's cryptic remark in *Theories of Surplus Value* that capitalism is hostile to art; but on the page facing that passage

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marx writes that "In order to examine the connection between spiritual production and material production it is above all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category but in *definite historical* form... Further: from the specific form of material production arises in the first place a specific structure of society, in the second place a specific relation of men to nature. Their State and their spiritual outlook is determined by both. Therefore also the kind of their spiritual production" (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Vol. I, p. 276). This quotation makes it clear that examination of the mediations between art and material production must be grounded in specific historical examination of the material production underlying the mediations, the nineteenth century capitalist form of which determined a specific pattern of uneven development categorized as "base" and "superstructure," and also a specific ideology of science and technology.

In Sanchez-Vasquez' discussion, the law of the uneven development of art and economy actually boils down to a purely negative statement that *no* pan-historical relationship can be established between the two. But even this negative "law" harbors the assumption that art and "material-utilitarian" production are commensurable: how else could they be established as developing unevenly? Some hierarchy of development must be imposed on each. Thus a universal "law" requires the reification of "base" and "superstructure" into universal constructs which can be isolated and measured in any society according to fixed scientific definitions. Then the quantitative distance ("number of links") between them can be ascertained, and hence the degree of their mutual autonomy. But then what the historical mediations mediate are two dehistoricized conceptual structures imposed on all history from the standpoint of liberal capitalism. Likewise, this entire "scientific" process ideologically universalizes a particular historical conception of science. As Marx indicates in the quotation above, such a method falsifies the examination of the mediations in question. Specific historical totalities different from nineteenth century capitalism cannot be understood when they are predefined as mere variations of its structure.

Imposing the requirements of Marxist "science" on the dialectics of praxis, Sanchez-Vasquez implies important political positions consonant with those of Western Communist Parties. He praises the Cuban revolution and displays essential solidarity with the course of development in the USSR. The Stalinism he argues against was the "period of the personality cult" and its dogmatism sprang from "no objective conditions"—an odd position for a "scientific" Marxist, since it evidently falls back to an "accidental" or "great man" theory of history in order to support the scientificity of Marxism. As with the question of the universality of Marxist "laws," here again the justification of Marxism as a science is ideological and contradictory. But Sanchez-Vasquez never once mentions the Chinese revolution which, besides probably having important bearing on political questions in Mexico, is also the strongest practical challenge to his assertions that science and technology are purely objective and inherently neutral. In China both scientific education and production technology have been explicitly politicized because their sociopolitical content has been recognized.

Perhaps more important for North American readers is the weakness of the discussion of mass culture in advanced capitalism. For Sanchez-Vasquez, mass culture not only drastically reduces the autonomy of art (its "distance" from economic exigencies); also, through its technological power this pseudo-culture creates its massified spectators by effectively hollowing them out: draining their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creative essence (243). Their only possible salvation comes through the "assimilation" of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which will impart the class consciousness needed to break mass culture's stranglehold and convert the brutalized "masses" into a revolutionary "people" (250). The cultural battle requires the reappropriation of a reified human quality of creativity which has been stolen (257-258). This mechanical conception of cultural politics in advanced capitalism, where hollow men must be filled with vital ideology so they can create, perpetuates the male-authoritarian orientation of dogmatic Leninism. It implies that a vanguard can preserve a liberatory ideology intact within mass culture: this idealist position may be valid for an *ideology* of liberation, precisely to the extent that such ideology helps reproduce capitalism. It is largely the dynamics of mass culture which reduce liberatory social movements to the defensive position of conserving an oppositional ideology which, as such, is no match for its conqueror and may even become the basis of a new mass-cultural "life-style," pacifying a new marginal subgroup and perhaps creating a new market. But it is not valid for revolutionary praxis, which grows out of its specific historical situation, instead of being preserved from and then reintroduced back into it. This position fails to address the question of how people are transformed in mass culture—what their historically specific new needs and potentials are. What is urgently needed is not an Eliot-like despair over the "spiritual hollowness" of "mass man" according to a reified ontology, but instead a dialectical critique directed toward the immanent revolutionary potential of cultural massification. The political practice developed in Tsarist Russia in *What Is to Be Done?* cannot be assumed to be revolutionary in the changed social relations of twentieth century Western capitalism.

The ideological attempt to reinject an ontological quality negated by mass culture remains an abstract negation which can only reproduce the problem it attacks. A *lost essence* is a rotten pillar of classical bourgeois humanism; asserting it against the ravages of a mass culture "beyond ideology" is a hopeless contest of early versus late ideology in late capitalism. A "scientific" Marxism seeking "what is" in mass culture cannot help overcome it, since it fails to take "mass man" seriously enough to perform the critique of the *contradictions* beneath the positivistic one-dimensional surface of mass culture—its incessant creation of new needs which it systematically frustrates. If mass culture simply sucks out a fixed creative human essence, it leaves people massified, hollow, entirely one-dimensional, completely passive, and practically subhuman (241-243, 253): revolution is impossible. For Sanchez-Vasquez, mass culture is an entirely negative force in the struggle for human liberation until a revolutionary society can give its inherently neutral technology a new use. But he leaves us no way to move toward this end.

The basic thrust and clear intention in Sanchez-Vasquez' book is to develop Marx's theory of praxis and his critique of alienated labor for Marxist aesthetic theory and nondogmatic Marxism. For this it is often very valuable; especially since many of the author's formulations of problems are exceptionally clear and direct. But this theoretical orientation points farther than Sanchez-Vasquez takes it, toward a critique of scientism and of orthodox Leninism. A universal Marxist "science" demands a fixed ontology which ultimately limits praxis. Manipulating "concrete labor" on a "neutral" assembly line technology by invoking an ideological universal "positive meaning" outside it (Leninist Taylorism); or manipulating abstract labor by dangling the illusory individual enticements of mass culture: weary of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cradle-to-grave manipulation toward never-never land, "mass man" might well doubt if there is much difference between these alternatives.

Justifying it by different ideologies, the consumer society and this producer sotiety both subordinate social organization to an external "objective" nature and a correspondingly immutable human nature—a "creativity," in this case, which must always strive antagonistically with nature to dominate it. Even though this ontology is based on the dialectics of praxis, it is an ideology ultimately determined by the framework of an essentially bourgeois materialism. The active side of natural necessity is the necessity of dominating nature: by embedding the creative praxis of art within this antinomic determinism, Sanchez-Vasquez blocks the radical political implications of his aesthetic theory. Through its blind exploitation of nature and its brutal manipulation of needs, today's capitalism has created radical new needs for an ecologically viable society free of hierarchical domination. The conceptions of a hostile external nature and a fixed human nature are socially more obsolete than ever. Theory based on these concepts cannot participate effectively in liberatory praxis based on new needs which negate them. The struggle against the destructive cooptation and falsification of these needs cannot be advanced through concepts which capitalism has rendered hollow and outmoded and which were always part of its ideology anyway. Despite his activist intentions and the considerable value of his book, I would argue that Sanchez-Vasquez fails to come to terms with these problems, and his theory suffers as a result.

Bart Grahl

Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974. 456 plus xxiii pp.

Juliet Mitchell's new book is important, exciting, and, I think, profoundly wrong. Its importance lies in her rejection of theories about women's oppression that assume as easy malleability of human social and cultural institutions. In so doing, she forces us to recognize what has become increasingly apparent in the years following the first joyous discovery of solidarity that marked the emergence of the recent women's movement: that the problem is ancient, complex and deeply rooted within ourselves and our social environment. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* can perhaps be best understood as an attempt to explain the tenacity and intransigeance of the old.

For this purpose, Mitchell presents a provocative exposition of Freud, with whom the women's movement has been in passionate contention since its inception. As Mitchell rightly points out, the debate has for the most part rested on a confusion of Freud's ideas with debased Freudian stereotypes, on a denunciation of therapeutic practice, on *ad hominem* and historicizing repudiations of the man and his work. Mitchell's acceptance of Freud's major tenets and her insistence on the importance of both the unconscious and infantile sexuality, raise the debate to a more substantive level by offering the possibility of real dialogue with a theorist who is paradoxically at once the most modern of Symbolic Fathers, and one of the few thinkers to make sexuality and the differences between men and women central to his work. I do not mean to imply that Mitchell stands alone—within recent months several other books have appeared linking women and psychoanalysis, and feminist psychologists and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anthropologists have been confronting similar issues for some time—but despite (or perhaps because of?) her often turgid style, Mitchell has acquired a reputation as an academic popularizer. She is a feminist thinker to whom women turn for explanations of other theorists, and in refusing to diminish Freud's highly ramified theoretical edifice by criticizing marginal aspects of his work, she has furthered the development of feminist theory.

Yet it is here, at the center of Mitchell's project, that I find it the most problematic. I have two fundamental levels of disagreement with her, one arising from her uncritical acceptance of Freud's notions of psycho-sexual development, the other from what I see as an erroneous interpretation of Freud's thought. This distortion pervades her exposition of his ideas (for all exposition is interpretive), but is most obvious and most crucial in the last section of the book, where she attempts a synthesis of Freud, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Marx.

In her introduction, Mitchell says that "if advocacy of Freud is the theme of this book, the conversation is at all times with the many aspects of feminism" (p. xix). It is, however, less a conversation than a monologue. Mitchell is indeed at all times eager to point out where feminist critics of Freud have gone wrong, but her reception of his theories has the intensity of a conversion experience and leads her to replicate his conceptual blind spots, often in precisely those areas where closer attention to women's experiences might be a useful corrective.

Some examples are trivial but revealing, such as her use of Freud's own statements to counter accusations that psychoanalysis was not a science but an art—a methodological absurdity embarassing in a thinker who is always so sharp on the scent of others' deficiencies. Other instances, again marginal I think, show that her loyalty to Freud's own logical consistency has prevented her from questioning both the relevance of some of his assertions or the evidence they rest on. She seems to accept his labelling (in Chapter 12) of women as vain, directed towards passive aims, able to achieve only a limited sense of justice, and so on (though mindful that Freud did not wish to underestimate the influence of social customs), simply because these qualities are the logical outgrowths of the woman's induction into culture through the Oedipus complex. I do not wish to dispute whether women display these characteristics (many do), or whether men do or do not (many do, and Freud could account for it, but it *is* questionable whether these distinctions contribute to our understanding of the social differences between men and women, and it is certain that their origin in unexamined social stereotypes has hardly been transformed by their inclusion in the canon of psychoanalytic theory.

More importantly, Mitchell's exposition of Freud's own ideas is marked by an appreciation of their evolution and development—in fact her account of his continual reformulations of bisexuality, the Oedipus complex, and psycho-sexual differentiation gives her exposition much of its depth and complexity—yet she is unwilling to grant that thinkers after Freud might, in their turn, have added something to psychoanalytic theory.

For instance, Mitchell criticizes Karen Horney[1] for her biological-sociological reductionism, but never mentions Horney's essay on "The Dread of Women," which

1. Her presentations of Reich and Laing are too long to analyze in detail, and lie outside the main thrust of her argument.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

points out some crucial inadequacies in Freud's arguments about the psychic differences between the sexes. Since Horney's contentions *are* embedded in a rather biologistic context, I will not reproduce her argument, but only mention her criticisms. Horney says that men, in analysis, in religion, in literature, display a dread of women which is often concealed by objectification ("*I* do not dread her; it is that *she* is evil..."), and claims that this dread is not adequately explained by "abhorrence due to the absence of the penis in women" because of its strong component of anxiety. In trying to account for this anxiety she turns to a consideration of the boy's early relations with his mother.

Such criticisms illuminate areas which remain obscured in Freudian theory: the importance of motherhood and the pre-Oedipal period for *both* sexes (the consequences for boys and girls would presumably be different), the inability of the castration complex to explain the dynamic and anxious quality of men's denigration of women, and the psychic difficulties involved in becoming a man. Even if Mitchell chooses to operate within psychoanalytic theory, it is difficult to understand how she, as a feminist, could not at least be sensitive to the neglect of these problems, and to Horney's contribution in raising them.

In a sense, it is easier to account for Freud's own lack of insight into these areas than Mitchell's, for he was a man, and therefore himself enmeshed in them. *Ad hominem?* Perhaps, yet Freud himself discussed instances where his feelings interfered with his thinking, and in any case, I think it can be shown that the relationship between subject and object in psychoanalysis makes it something other than the strict science Mitchell claims it is.

But let us proceed with the text. Freud thought that the pre-Oedipal period was especially important for the girl because the mother is the girl's first love-object, and the girl, unlike the boy, cannot shift the negative feelings (hostility arising from the frustration of the baby's boundless need for love) from this primary attachment onto the father (pp. 54-57). This phase of mother-attachment must be completely displaced onto the father (the girl's recognition of her castration awakens hostile feelings towards the mother, and she represses her active aims towards her mother, and directs her libido towards being loved by her father, or rather, and then into wanting a man who can give her a baby), but its underlying strength and ambivalence is one reason why the path to normal womanhood is so tortuous.

Within this model, the boy's path to manhood is relatively straightforward. He, too, is first attached to the mother, but "his Oedipal situation is nothing more than an intensification of his pre-Oedipal mother love" (p. 110). The boy's castration complex is the signal for him to renounce his desire either to be like or to desire his mother, and, by identifying with his father, to "enter into the promise of his patriarchal heritage:" that one day he will have a woman, too (p. 110).

I find Freud's account altogether rather difficult to accept, but I would like to show, by working within it, that even if one accepts its essentials, there are many variations possible, many areas where analysts cognizant of new material *could* arrive at new implications. It is, then, particularly irresponsible of Mitchell, who does accept Freud's model, not to subject it to any criticism.

Returning to Horney's questions, which are similar to questions raised to the women's movement, it is apparent that one thing Freud's account leaves out is the complex nature of the boy's identification with his mother, a primary identification which must be ruthlessly suppressed for the fulfillment of identification with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

father, which is the resolution of the boy's Oedipal complex.

I think Freud's lack of concentration on this issue was linked to his pervasive denial of the importance of motherhood. For instance, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* he talks of the origins of the religious attitude in "the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it. . . . I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection" (p. 19, Norton College Edition).

In fact, and here I will be playing the Freudian game for a while, it is much more likely that the infant perceives his helplessness in relation to the mother, for nearly universally it is a mother's care which insures a baby's survival. Moreover, the "primary identification with the human form" (Mitchell, p. 39) which takes place very early in life is with a mother. And this identification, like all later ones, is compounded of elements of terror, loss, and deprivation as well as love: just as the boy identifies with the father out of fear of castration, so he must identify very early in life with the mother, and become "a lovable object" to ensure her nurturance and his survival. It is in this way, according to Freud, that the ego is formed. The lost object, the large and overwhelming (and sometimes angry, for despite Lacan's analogy, a mother is *not* a mirror) human presence that gives a baby boy his first notions of love and loss, *and self*, the primordial other that is incorporated into the newly precipitated ego, is the mother.

Perhaps it is the ambivalences and cross-currents of this primary identification (compounded, for boys as well as girls out of elements of frustration and rage) that give rise to the persistent myths of matriarchy, the fear of female goddesses of birth and death, or like the Eumenides, of revenge—and to the need for men to diminish women in order to increase their own self-esteem? I am not a psychoanalyst, and cannot trace the vicissitudes of a boy's early mother-identification through the complexities of the Oedipal period with precision. However, it does seem that, whereas for the girl the castration complex and Oedipal situation involve a painful renunciation of the mother as *object* of love, the boy's Oedipal complex, as elucidated by Mitchell, is resolved in terms of a change in identification. He must suppress the feminine in himself in order to keep his phallus, and become like the father instead.

The symbolic threat under which this suppression takes place is that of castration: if he continues to *be like* his mother, the boy will, like her, be deprived of his phallus. Yet the boy still have to resolve his ambivalent feelings about the Symbolic Father whose superior phallus he fears and, from hating and fearing his father, pass into an identification with him. It is here that fear and loathing of "the womanly" may take on the dynamic element which seems lacking in Freud's notion that boys see women as castrated and therefore inferior. (If they are only poor castrated creatures, why fear them?) The boy must "put down" what is womanly within himself, must displace his hatred of his father onto hatred of his own womanly qualities (which allows him to give legitimate expression to the fear and hatred of the mother which are the archaic residues of his first identification, but leaves him, perhaps, forever anxious about his betrayal), in order to become close to his father, to become a man.[2]

2. For further amplification of these ideas, see Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford U. Press, 1974), pp. 43-66, and the unpublished papers of Nancy Jay at the Sociology Department, Brandeis University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The above excursion into Freud's model of psycho-sexual development shows two things: that as formulated by Freud and recapitualted by Mitchell it has many weaknesses, and that within the model there is room for flexibility that Mitchell has not exploited. It is a complex scheme, and one which can be used to explore material Freud did not account for—material that *must* be accounted for by any feminist interested in Freud.

If Mitchell accepts Freud without those modifications one might expect from a feminist, how then does she use him, and how does she integrate his theories into *her* theories about patriarchy and women's oppression? Her argument builds from certain fundamental assumptions in an almost theological manner. I will follow its logical development, pointing out inconsistencies and disputing propositions along the way. I would like to demonstrate first, that her use of Freud is idiosyncratic, and then that, even if one grants her presuppositions about Freud, her thinking leads into theoretical contradictions which are almost impossible to resolve.

The argument begins with Mitchell's assertion that psychoanalysis is a science which deals with the unconscious (pp. 5-6). "We could say that psychoanalysis is about the material reality of ideas both within, and of, man's history; thus in 'penis-envy' we are talking not about an anatomical organ, but about the ideas of it that people hold and live by within the general culture, the order of human society. . . . The way we live as 'ideas' the necessary laws of human society is not so much conscious as *unconscious*—the particular task of psychoanalysis is to decipher how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the unconscious mind, or to put it another way, the unconscious mind *is* the way in which we acquire these laws" (p. xvi). The unconscious is "knowable and normal"—it contains normal thought (it is always ideational), utterly transformed by its own laws (the primary process: symbolization, displacement, and condensation), but recognizable if one can deduce the manner in which it is transformed. The analyst, interpreting manifestations of the unconscious in dreams, slips of the tongue and pen, etc., can gain objective (therefore scientific) knowledge of its workings.

The unconscious is certainly normal, but whether it is entirely knowable or not is questionable—it finds expression in symbolic dreams and utterances but in so doing, becomes mediated by language and therefore available to consciousness. A therapist can *infer* what lies within the unconscious by interpreting its eruptions, but that "meeting point of biology and society" (p. 221) which is unconscious is compounded, surely, of desires, needs, and passions which stretch back into that period of an infant's life before his sense of self and the world were even framed in language. It is therefore also not entirely ideational: if it were, Freud would be purely a cognitive theorist. Moreover (and here I take issue with Freud as well as Mitchell), the knowledge which can be gained about the unconscious is not strictly scientific but interpretive (is a particular dream-thought condensed and or displaced; what do its symbols *mean?*) and is born of a relationship between subject and object (the transference relationship which is very different from that proposed by the natural sciences. Within this relationship, the therapist can perhaps claim more objectivity, since it is the hallmark of a patient's transference that his central relationships to other people are "laid on" the analyst, yet the analyst's own memory and interpretations are hampered by his unconscious desires and feelings as well (p. 75).

However, let us examine Mitchell's contentions about the unconscious within the framework of her argument. Does it help explain 'how we acquire our heritage of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ideas and laws of human society?' In discussing the Oedipus complex, Mitchell remarks that it is "not the *actual* family situation or the conscious desires it evokes .... What *actually* and specifically happens is nowhere near as important as what is *expected* to happen in man's general cultural history" (pp. 63-64). Again, she says about the castration complex that "The *actual* threat can be absent but the *idea* of it is still there. Furthermore, other factors than a literal threat enter into the castration complex: the anatomical distinction between the sexes and the cultural law of patriarchy play their parts" (p. 74). These ideas are close to her criticisms of Reich, Laing and many feminists: according to Mitchell, they deny importance to the internal, unconscious experience of events and reduce the family or woman's oppression of the biologistic or sociologistic dimension. However valid her objections, her understanding of the unconscious leads to an equally reductionist stance, for when she abstracts unconscious processes from lived experiences she cannot account for cultural transmission except by the biological inheritance of ideas. She quotes Freud to explain how the superego becomes, through its relationship to the id, the heir to the cultural acquisitions of mankind: "Thus in the id, which is capable of being inherited, are harboured residues of the existences of countless egos" (p. 72). And, in support of Freud's notion of a collective mind: "The unconscious is everyman's heritage of how mankind lives.... The 'inheritance' referred to here is that of human culture" (p. 315). Such statements mark a thinly disguised admission of theoretical failure: if psychoanalysis cannot account for the transmission of culture by an examination of the individual, it takes refuge in a hypostatized unconscious. Abstract, typical, and inherited innate ideas are offered as a substitute for a more grounded understanding of social and historical change *as well as* for the individual's acquisition of culture in interaction with the social world.

Mitchell's notion of the unconscious is brought to fruition in her discussion of patriarchy. She assumes that patriarchy is coincident with civilization, probably with culture. She does not search for its origins (which may well be a thankless task), but asks how it happens now and looks for 'universal' features which would explain its universal presence (pp. 364-369). For analysis, she turns to Lévi-Strauss; he defines culture as the transformation of the biological family by the taboo on incest, which forces each family to give up a member in exogamous marriage: it is always men who exchange women (p. 370). Culture is always patriarchal, because the difference between the agents and objects of exchange may be exploited to establish a system of deference. Culture is then patriarchal *by definition*, because of "the need for exogamy" (p. 373). (In passing, it is not established that all cultures exchange women, and Lévi-Strauss's 'biological family' which must be transformed is *not* natural, but itself a mark of human culture. In primates, the unit is mother child.)

If culture is definitionally patriarchal, and the unconscious *is* the order of human society (p. 391), where does Mitchell find possibilities for liberation? Phrased differently, if "the unconscious is the way man lives his humanity in harmony and conflict with his particularly and historically determined environment... *it* is why women are everywhere within civilization the second sex, but everywhere differently so" (p. 381), if this unconscious rules our lives, and contains the patriarchal cultural laws, and is inherited through generations, not only liberation but change itself is virtually impossible. Perhaps in a few thousand years....

The last stage in Mitchell's increasingly convoluted argument is accomplished with the help of Marx. He is her *deus ex machina*. Under capitalism, she observes,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kinship is no longer terribly important. Other modes of exchange (than that of women) define culture, and "the masses," no longer embedded in extended families, no longer need exogamy for ensuring the establishment of a wider social bond, since labor is now social. The modern nuclear family is "established in the context of its redundancy" (p. 411); there is a "contradiction between the internalized law of patriarchal human order described by Freud as the Oedipus complex, and its embodiment in the nuclear family" (p. 413) which women can exploit to overthrow patriarchy itself.

There is an even greater contradiction in Mitchell's slapdash application of Marxist theory to a theory of patriarchy which is profoundly a-historical. She avoids the issue by saying that: "Patriarchy describes the universal culture—however, each specific mode of production must express this in different ideological forms. The universal aspects of patriarchy set in motion by 'the death of the father'...are rehearsed differently in the mind of man in different societies" (p. 409). However, this mechanistic formulation does violence to Marx's theory. It is only by fleeing into an abstract realm where structures determine life that one can attempt a synthesis of two such different modes of analysis. The phrase "each specific mode of production must express this in different ideological forms" indicates such a flight. Similarly, her assertions that the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy are "two autonomous areas" (p. 412) indicates her distance from Marx's understanding of how ideas interrelate with material reality.

It is her own ideas about culture, however, that reveal with finality how divergent her analysis is from historical materialism. As she elucidates it, culture is not made by human beings: its essentials are unconscious ideas, inherited without fundamental change over time, and operating with little reference to the particulars of historically contingent experience. She says that "Freud precisely did *not* believe things were biological, instinctual and changeless: he thought they were cultural" (p. 324), but her understanding of culture is, in its essentials, *a priori*stic and changeless as well. If we remain faithful to Mitchell's argument, her use of Marx can only be seen as a millennarian attempt to break out of her own theoretical straitjacket. The book, then, is a dense and thoughtful project in feminist theory whose main contribution may be its delineation of the difficulties all future students must face. Ultimately, however, in trying to graft a theory of the historical constitution of the human species onto a theory which collapses history into an expression of a-temporal, universal truths, Mitchell demonstrates on a theoretical level what the proverbial old wives have said about the human condition since time immemorial: "You can't have your cake and eat it too."

Elizabeth Long

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX OF ISSUES 16—20

The index for issues 1—10 may be found in Telos 10 (Winter 1971); that for issues 11—15 may be found in Telos 15 (Spring 1973).

ARTICLES

Adorno, Theodor W., "Lyric Poetry and Society" .....no. 20, p. 56
Adorno, Theodor W., "The Stars Down to Earth:
The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column".....no. 19, p. 13
Adorno, Theodor W., "Theses Against Occultism" .....no. 19, p. 7
Arato, Andrew, "The Second International: A Reexamination".no. 18, p. 2
Aronson, Ronald, "*L'Idiot de la famille*: The Ultimate Sartre?".no. 20, p. 90
Aronson, Ronald, "Sartre's Individualist Social Theory" .....no. 16, p. 68
Carlo, Antonio, "Lenin on the Party" .....no. 17, p. 2
Cavalcanti, Pedro and Rubem Fernandes, "An Unfinished Conversation:
Two Oppressed People unable to Agree".....no. 18, p. 136
D'Amico, Robert, "The Contours and Coupures
of Structuralist Theory" .....no. 17, p. 70
Fekete, John, "The New Criticism: Ideological
Evolution of the Right Opposition".....no. 19, p. 2
Fernandes, Rubem and Pedro Cavalcanti, "An Unfinished Conversation:
Two Oppressed People unable to Agree".....no. 18, p. 136
George, François, "Forgetting Lenin" .....no. 18, p. 53
Goldmann, Lucien, "Introduction to the Problems
of a Sociology of the Novel" .....no. 18, p. 122
Gorz, André, "The Tyranny of the Factory:
Today and Tomorrow" .....no. 16, p. 61
Gross, David, "On Writing Cultural Criticism" .....no. 16, p. 38
Habermas, Jürgen, "On Social Identity" .....no. 19, p. 91
Howard, Dick, "Re-reading Luxemburg" .....no. 18, p. 89
Hurley, Robert, "Introduction to Lyotard".....no. 19, p. 124
Jacoby, Russell, "Laing, Cooper and the
Tension in Theory and Therapy".....no. 17, p. 41
Jay, Martin, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Karl
Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge" .....no. 20, p. 72
Kellner, Douglas, "Introduction to Marcuse's 'On the
Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor' " .....no. 16, p. 2
Liehm, Antonin, "Jan Kott: Between
Shakespeare and Euripides" .....no. 19, p. 104
Lyotard, Jean-François, "Adorno as the Devil".....no. 19, p. 128
Marcuse, Herbert, "On the Philosophical Foundation of
the Concept of Labor in Economics" .....no. 16, p. 9
Mayo, Bruce, "Introduction to Adorno's
'Lyric Poetry and Society' ".....no. 20, p. 52
Rovatti, Pier Aldo, "The Critique of Fetishism
in Marx's *Grundrisse*" .....no. 17, p. 56
Sanders, Scott, "Towards a Social Theory of Literature".....no. 18, p. 107
Telos Staff, "Introduction to Adorno".....no. 19, p. 2
Tronti, Mario, "Social Capital" .....no. 17, p. 98

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTES AND COMMENTARY

Carlo, Antonio, "Towards a Redefinition of Imperialism" ....no. 20, p. 108
D'Amico, Robert, "Introduction to the
Foucault-Deleuze Discussion".....no. 16, p. 101
Deleuze, Gilles and Michel Foucault, "The Intellectuals
and Power: A Discussion".....no. 16, p. 103
Foucault, Michel, "On Attica: An Interview".....no. 19, p. 154
Foucault, Michel and Gilles Deleuze, "The Intellectuals
and Power: A Discussion".....no. 16, p. 103
Frankel, Serge and Daniel Martin, "The Budapest School"....no. 17, p. 122
Giradin, Jean-Claude, "Towards a Politics of Signs:
Reading Baudrillard".....no. 10, p. 127
Gorz, André, "Their Factories and Our People".....no. 18, p. 150
Heckman, John, "Hyppolite and the Hegel Revival in France" .no. 16, p. 128
Hegedüs, Andras and Maria Markus, "Modernization and
the Alternatives of Social Progress".....no. 17, p. 145
Howard, Dick, "In Memory of Serge Mallet".....no. 20, p. 119
Hungarian Communist Party, "A Document".....no. 17, p. 134
Markus, Maria and Andras Hegedüs, "Modernization and
the Alternatives of Social Progress".....no. 17, p. 145
Patocka, Jan, "On the Principle of Scientific Conscience".....no. 18, p. 158
Poster, Mark, "The Hegel Renaissance".....no. 15, p. 109
Sartre, Jean-Paul, "On Maoism: An Interview".....no. 16, p. 92
Shmueli, Efraim, "Can Phenomenology
Accomodate Marxism?".....no. 17, p. 169
Solomon, Maynard, "Beethoven and the Enlightenment" ....no. 19, p. 146
Solomon, Robert C., "Beethoven and the Sonata Form".....no. 19, p. 141
Svitak, Ivan, "Marginal Notes on Prague Spring 1968".....no. 17, p. 157
Yugoslav Embassy, "On the Ideological and Moral Fitness
of Professors and Teaching Staff at Belgrade University"..no. 18, p. 156
Zukin, Sharon, "The Case of the 'Belgrade Eight' ".....no. 19, p. 138

REVIEWS

Adorno, Theodor W., *Jargon of Authenticity* (Kellner).....no. 19, p. 184
Aronowitz, Stanley, *False Promises* (Isaacs).....no. 18, p. 162
Baudrillard, Jean, *Le Miroir de la Production* (Poster).....no. 18, p. 171
Baxandall, Lee, ed., *Radical Perspectives in the Arts* (Grahl)..no. 18, p. 189
Bell, Daniel, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (Schroyer).no. 19, p. 162
Bettelheim, Charles and Paul Sweezy, *The Transition
to Socialism* (Mattick, Jr.).....no. 20, p. 167
Brown, Bruce, *Marx, Freud and the
Critique of Everyday Life* (Aronowitz).....no. 18, p. 178
Daubier, Jean, *A History of the Chinese
Cultural Revolution* (Ross).....no. 20, p. 138
Esmein, Jean, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Ross).....no. 20, p. 138
Godelier, Maurice, *Rationality and Irrationality
in Economics* (Mattick).....no. 18, p. 182

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gouldner, Alvin W., *For Sociology* (Piccone) .....no. 19, p. 176
Hsia, Adrian, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Ross).....no. 20, p. 138
Jay, Martin, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Piccone) .....no. 16, p. 146
Karol, K.S. *La deuxième révolution chinoise* (Ross) .....no. 20, p. 138
Laxer, Robert M., ed., (*Canada*) *Ltd.* (Levine) .....no. 20, p. 174
Lifshitz, Mikhail, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* (Grahl) .no. 19, p. 182
Lowy, Michael, *The Marxism of Che Guevara* (Radosh) .....no. 17, p. 189
Lynd, Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., *Rank and File* (Isaacs) .no. 18, p. 162
Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta, *Letters from inside the PCI to Louis Althusser* (Good) .....no. 16, p. 150
Marcuse, Herbert, *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Frankel) ....no. 16, p. 156
Mitchell, Juliet, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Long) .....no. 20, p. 183
Moore, Barrington Jr., *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery* (Leiss) .....no. 17, p. 182
Sale, Kirkpatrick, *SDS* (Lipsitz) .....no. 16, p. 153
Sanchez-Vasquez, Adolfo, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* (Grahl).....no. 20, p. 178
Schiller, Herbert I., *The Mind Managers* (Ewen) .....no. 17, p. 185
Schram, Stuart, ed., *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China* (Ross).....no. 20, p. 138
Schroyer, Trent, *The Critique of Domination* (McCarthy).....no. 20, p. 161
Sweezy, Paul and Charles Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialism* (Mattick, Jr.) .....no. 20, p. 167
Wakeman, Frederic Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Fogel) .....no. 20, p. 153

FORTHCOMING FROM *TELOS* PRESS:

History, Philosophy and Culture in the Young Gramsci

Edited with Introduction by Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone

Selected writings of the young Gramsci from the pre-1919 period. An anthology of short essays written for the general public (originally published as newspaper articles) which indicates the depth of Gramsci's thought and his analysis of philosophical, cultural and political phenomena, this book is a must for anyone interested in understanding the Hegelian roots of Gramsci's Marxism. Expected publication date: October 1974. Price: $2.50 paperbound.

approximately 190 pages.

Order your copy from *Telos*, c/o Department of Sociology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri 63130. Include payment to avoid additional postage and handling charges. Foreign orders add 10%. Make checks or money orders payable to *Telos*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Towards a New Marxism: Proceedings of the First Telos *Conference*

Edited by Bart Grahl and Paul Piccone
233 pages + index.

Aware of the rapid internal disintegration of the New Left movement, the *Telos* staff, in collaboration with the students of the University of Waterloo, organized a conference on "The New Marxism" in order to investigate the possibility of salvaging valuable theoretical indications from the forgotten Western Marxist tradition. This anthology consists of many of the papers presented there, as well as supplements to them. Price is $8.50 hardbound, $2.75 paperbound.

Table of Contents

PAUL PICCONE: *Introduction*
PAUL BREINES: *Notes on 'Old Culture and New Culture'*
GEORG LUKACS: *Old Culture and New Culture*
MICHAEL KOSOK: *Dialectics of Nature*
PAUL PICCONE: *Phenomenological Marxism*
PAUL BUHLE: *Marxism in the United States*
RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA: *Hegelian Leninism*
DAVID GROSS: *Marxism and Utopia: Ernst Bloch*
DICK HOWARD: *Existentialism and Marxism*
LUCIO COLLETTI: *The Theory of the Crash*

Marx and Engels on Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings

Edited by Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski
Introduction by Stefan Morawski
154 pages + bibliography and index.

The first volume in a series of Documents on Marxist Aesthetics under the editorial direction of Lee Baxandall, this work consists of many previously untranslated articles by Marx and Engels, and a special supplement of notes on the two figures by members of their families and other contemporaries. Price: $6.95 hardbound, $2.95 paperbound.

Order from *Telos*, c/o Department of Sociology, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri 63130. Please prepay to avoid postage and handling charges. Foreign orders (including Canada) add 10%. Make checks or money orders payable to *Telos*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK ISSUES STILL AVAILABLE!
(Do you have a full set?)

SELECTED CONTENTS OF BACK ISSUES

7
F. GEORGE: Reading Althusser
VAJDA & HELLER: Family Structure and Communism
M. MERLEAU-PONTY: Pravda
A. ARATO: Lukács' Path to Marxism

8
M. KOSOK: The Phenomenology of Fucking
L. COLLETTI: The Marxism of the Second International
TRAN DUC THAO: The Phenomenology of Mind and its Real Content
H. MARCUSE: The Concept of Negation in the Dialectic

9
P. PICCONE: Phenomenological Marxism
M. SOLOMON: Beethoven, Sonata and Utopia
J.-P. SARTRE: Replies to Structuralism: An Interview
R. JACOBY: The Politics of Subjectivity

10
G. LUKACS: Moses Hess and the Problems of the Idealist Dialectic
D. KETTLER: Culture and Revolution
R. JACOBY: Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism

11
G. LUKACS: The New Edition of Lassalle's Letters
A. ARATO: Lukács' Theory of Reification
P. BREINES: The Impact of Lukács and Korsch
P. PICCONE: Dialectic and Materialism in Lukács

12
A. GORZ: Technical Intelligence and the Capitalist Division of Labor
T. SCHROYER: The Dialectical Foundations of Critical Theory
M. VAJDA: The Rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany

13
S. BOLOGNA: Class Composition and Theory of the Party
K. KOSIK: Our Present Crisis
L. COLLETTI: The Theory of the Crash
M. SOLOMON: Marx and Bloch: Reflections on Utopia and Art

14
R. JACOBY: Negative Psychoanalysis and Marxism
M. TRONTI: Workers and Capital
J. COHEN: Max Weber and the Dynamics of Domination
T. SCHROYER: Marx's Theory of the Crisis

15
M. HORKHEIMER: The Authoritarian State
P.A. ROVATTI: Critical Theory and Phenomenology
F. FEHER: Is the Novel Problematic?
J. FEKETE: Counterrevolution in Cultural Theory

16
H. MARCUSE: The Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor
D. GROSS: On Writing Cultural Criticism
A. GORZ: The Tyranny of the Factory
R. ARONSON: Sartre's Individualist Social Theory
J.-P. SARTRE: On Maoism: An Interview

17
Á. CARLO: Lenin on the Party
R. D'AMICO: The Contours and Coupures of Structuralist Theory
P.A. ROVATTI: The Critique of Fetishism in the *Grundrisse*
M. TRONTI: Social Capital

18
A. ARATO: Reexamining the Second International
F. GEORGE: Forgetting Lenin
L. GOLDMANN: Problems of a Sociology of the Novel
A. GORZ: Their Factories and Our People

19
T.W. ADORNO: Theses Against Occultism
T.W. ADORNO: The Stars Down to Earth
J. HABERMAS: On Social Identity
A. LIEHM: Kott: Between Shakespeare and Euripides

Price for single copies is $2.00. We are sorry that we cannot supply copies of issues 1-6. All foreign orders please add 10% to cover extra handling costs.

Price: $2.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED